

Color, Line, and Narrative: Visual Art Techniques in Lev Tolstoy's Fiction

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates Tolstoy's anxiety over the written word and its ability to communicate truth to the reader. I examine how Tolstoy compensates for the shortcomings of language by borrowing techniques from painting, sculpture, and drawing, and how the visual nature of his work shifts in connection with his philosophy. I identify two visual extremes in Tolstoy's art and thought, the juxtaposition of which sets up two ends of a spectrum upon which I measure the aesthetic gradations of *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *Confession*, and *The Death of Ivan Ilych*.

I call Tolstoy's earlier aesthetic "painterly" in nature, drawing from the numerous qualities of spatial literature it contains as well as its inclusion of a rich color palette and various ekphrastic passages. I begin my discussion of this "painterly" aesthetic in an examination of the 1857 short story "Lucerne." I then trace the shifts in Tolstoy's visuality toward what I term his "draughtsmanly" aesthetic. This later visuality, which culminates in the 1899 novel *Resurrection*, features many aspects of temporal literature, such as increased reliance on plot progression, as well as a black-and-white color scheme and increased use of contrasts that give the work a sculptural feel.

My project is the first in the field to explore visual art techniques in Tolstoy, and reevaluates the author's later works that are often dismissed as aesthetically inferior to his earlier writing. I note how the changes in Tolstoy's visual aesthetic relate to shifts in his moral and philosophical worldview, which changes from one open to questions and change, to an unshakeable and uniquely Tolstoyan understanding of life and the best way to live it. I argue that neither aesthetic is superior to the other and that both are equally representative of Tolstoy's own personal reality at the time of each work's creation.

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INTRODUCTION

In an entry in his diary on July 3, 1851, Tolstoy writes “I will go along and describe what I see. But how can I write this? I have to go and sit down at the ink-spotted desk, take out the grey paper and ink, smear my fingers and draw letters on the paper. The letters form words, the words—phrases; but can you really convey a feeling? Isn’t it impossible...Description is insufficient.”¹ Here Tolstoy discusses the writing process less as a verbal endeavor and more as a physical activity during which he creates images on the page. He is not writing, but rather drawing; letters merge to form words and phrases like small brushstrokes that blend together to produce an image. Though in his early stages of writing Tolstoy is most concerned with description, he still expresses distrust of the written word and its inability to convey meaning to the reader. This unease is what Boris Eikhenbaum calls Tolstoy’s “dissatisfaction with words,”² his lack of confidence in the ability of verbal art to portray the visual.

I argue that Tolstoy, one of the most prominent and prolific figures in Russian literature and European realism, incorporates techniques from the visual, arts such as painting, drawing and sculpture, in his work to compensate for the inadequacies he perceived in the written word. In this early description of the creative process he portrays a space that resembles an artist’s studio more than a writer’s desk, a paint-spattered palette more than a sheet of writing paper.

I identify two poles within Tolstoy’s visual aesthetic: the earlier “painterly” and the later “draughtsmanly” aesthetics. His engagement with two paintings, one in *Anna Karenina* and one

¹ Пойду, опишу я, что вижу. Но как написать это. Надо пойти, сесть за закапанный чернилами стол, взять серую бумагу, чернила; пачкать пальцы и чертить по бумаге буквы. Буквы составят слова, слова — фразы; но разве можно передать чувство. Нельзя-ли какнибудь...Описание недостаточно. L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1928–1958), 46:654.

² Boris Eikhenbaum, *The Young Tolstoi*, translated by Gary Kern, (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1972), 28.

in *Resurrection*, reveals these “painterly” and “draughtsmanly” styles respectively. This first painting, one of the most famous instances of *ekphrasis* in Tolstoy, is the detailed description of Mikhailov’s portrait of Anna Karenina. Tolstoy presents his reader with multiple perspectives of the same painting. In one description, the reader sees the portrait through the eyes of the autobiographically-based character Konstantin Levin:

Levin looked at the portrait, which, in the brilliant illumination, projected out of its frame, and he could not tear himself away from it. He even forgot where he was, and not listening to what was being said, he did not take his eyes off the amazing portrait. This was not a picture but a splendid, living woman with black waving hair, bared shoulders and arms, and a pensive half-smile on her lips which were covered with a tender bloom, who looked at him triumphantly and tenderly with disarming eyes. Only, because she was not alive, she was even more beautiful than a living woman could be.

Левин смотрел на портрет, в блестящем освещении выступавший из рамы, и не мог оторваться от него. Он даже забыл, где был, и, не слушая того, что говорилось, не спускал глаз с удивительного портрета. Это была не картина, а живая прелестная женщина с черными вьющимися волосами, обнаженными плечами и руками и задумчивою полуулыбкой на покрытых нежным пушком губах, победительно и нежно смотревшая на него смущавшими его глазами. Только потому она была не живая, что она была красивее, чем может быть живая.³

Here Tolstoy describes not only the physical attributes of the painting, but also the effect it has on its viewers. Tolstoy communicates the vividness of the painting to the reader by explaining how Anna’s figure steps out of the frame, how it was not a painting, but a living woman. He continues his description beyond this impression by including a number of physical aspects of the painting. Tolstoy plays to both the visual and tactile as he notes the “tender down” that frames Anna’s half-smiling lips. Amy Mandelker points out that *Anna Karenina* is the only major work of Tolstoy’s where, in an instance of *ekphrasis*, “the narrative is suspended” to discuss the nature and purpose of art. Tolstoy makes it so that the reader, like Levin, cannot tear himself or herself away from the painting. By interrupting the narrative flow with this detailed description which plays to all of the senses in order to create a more striking and immersive

³ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Marian Schwartz, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 634 [Tolstoy, PSS 19:273].

impression for the reader, Tolstoy momentarily turns his reader into a viewer, whom he briefly detains in both time and space.

The treatment of painting in Tolstoy's later work differs in many respects from the intimately illustrative qualities of his earlier writings. In the 1899 *Resurrection* Prince Dmitri Nekhliudov views and reflects upon various paintings throughout the novel. Nekhliudov's experience of his mother's portrait is a significant moment in the work's moral message, and an example of Tolstoy's new handling of the visual arts in his fiction.

In an attempt to evoke happy memories of her in himself, he looked at her portrait, five thousand roubles-worth of painting by a famous master. She was depicted in a black velvet off-the-shoulder dress. The painter had made much of her bosom, with a marked cleavage between her breasts, and the dazzling beauty of her shoulders and neck. It was totally vile and mean. There was something revolting, even sacrilegious about this depiction of his mother in her glamorous semi-nudity.

Желая вызвать в себе хорошее воспоминание о ней, он взглянул на ее портрет, за 5000 рублей написанный знаменитым живописцем. Она была изображена в бархатном черном платье, с обнаженной грудью. Художник, очевидно, с особенным старанием выписал грудь, промежуток между двумя грудями и ослепительные по красоте плечи и шею. Это было уже совсем стыдно и гадко. Что-то было отвратительное и кощунственное в этом изображении матери в виде полуобнаженной красавицы.⁴

Tolstoy's description of the painting is stark, and the lack of additional details focuses the reader's gaze more intently on those Tolstoy *does* choose to mention. In this way he makes the contrast between clothing and bare flesh in the painting all the more striking, playing positive and negative space against one another in a mostly black and white image.⁵ The reader is not distracted by or lost in the painting. Instead Tolstoy avoids extraneous detail in order to draw attention to the moral message at the heart of the work.

Each painting depicts a sexualized female figure. In the earlier novel Tolstoy does not overtly comment on Anna's sexuality. He focuses on her beauty and vivacity, which though alluring, do not bring more than a sexual undertone to the description. In Mme. Nekhliudov's

⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, trans. Anthony Briggs, (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 115 [Tolstoi, 32:99].

⁵ Tolstoy only mentions the color black, which as one can imagine would contrast strongly with the white of the woman's skin. No other colors are mentioned in the description of the portrait.

“semi-nudity,” the accentuation of her cleavage, and emphasis on her bare shoulders and neck, Tolstoy exaggerates her role as sexual object.

The aesthetic of *Resurrection* allows Tolstoy to overtly expound upon ideas only hinted at in *Anna Karenina*. Tolstoy’s later visual aesthetic features starker contrasts and focuses more on the outlines of an image than small details or color. By forgoing the mention of visual minutia, Tolstoy does not halt the narrative as he did in *Anna Karenina*. The reader of *Resurrection* can, and is almost forced, to look away from the painting and focus rather on the ethical questions it raises for Nekhliudov before returning to the progression of the plot. The description of Anna’s portrait, representative of Tolstoy’s “painterly aesthetic,” is detailed and engaging while its message is complex and at times ambiguous. Tolstoy’s engagement with Mme. Nekhliudova’s portrait, exemplary of the author’s “draughtsmanly” style, is short, the description is stark and purposeful, and the moral message becomes abundantly clear.

I. Realism

For some, Tolstoy’s focus on the visual may come as a surprise since he was a writer of realist literature, not a painter. However, according to scholars like Peter Brooks, the visual is eternally entwined with realism, which “needs to give a sense of the thereness of the physical world, as in a still-life painting...[realism] is a term resolutely attached to the visual.”⁶ Realism in both literature and painting is a concept that at first seems self-explanatory but in fact proves rather elusive. Some scholars including Brooks define realism in part as the artistic recreation of reality, an imitation of life which is the “product of a more dispassionate and scientific scrutiny,” the aim of which is objectivity.⁷

⁶ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 16.

⁷ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 11.

Within European realism, which began in France in the 1830s, the focus of art became increasingly secular and genres such as the landscape, portrait, still-life, and genre painting rose in popularity. Painters like Gustave Courbet used the grand scale formerly reserved for history paintings⁸ to represent the lower classes in an “objective” unidealized manner. This gritty representation of the peasantry and urban poor, dressed in stained, fraying clothes amidst sordid surroundings was a far cry from the perfectly-proportioned, flawless figures of Romanticism. The canvases of Courbet, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Jean-François Millet and others emphasize the dirt, shadows, wrinkles, and imperfections of the everyday. They present the “vérité humaine” rather than an “idéalité poétique.”

The concept of verisimilitude, of “truth,” is central to the realist aesthetic. However, a “truthful, objective and impartial representation” is paradoxically subjective.⁹ Courbet’s truth, depicted through rough, hurried brushstrokes, is based on the immediacy of perception. The manner in which he handles the paint suggests that the image is translated directly from the artist’s personal experience to the canvas. Courbet, though working at the same time and often in the same places as other French realists, depicted his own version of “truth.” Millet found his truth in the depiction of the peasantry and their lives of monotonous, back-breaking work. Corot’s truth lay in depictions of the French landscape. Therefore even “truth” and the way in which it is represented can be highly subjective and artificial. Courbet’s realism differs from that of his contemporaries, just as painterly realism differs from literary, and European realism from Russian.

⁸ History painting refers not only to representations of historical events, but also to paintings of Biblical and mythological scenes.

⁹ Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (New York: Penguin Books Inc., 1971), 13.

Looking at realism within a Russian context, in her recent monograph *Russian Realisms*, Molly Brunson examines realism as it applies specifically to Russian literature and painting in the mid-to late nineteenth century. Brunson begins her discussion by describing realism as a “movement that compels all arts—literary, visual, musical, and dramatic—to forgo the fantasies and phantasms of romanticism for more sober and democratic subjects with positivist pretensions.”¹⁰ Brunson too finds realism paradoxical. She argues that “realism is, in a word, aspirational... [the] aspiration to collapse art into life.” However, the ambitions of realism are approached with the expectation of failure. For Brunson, Russian “realism is more an orientation toward a grand and obviously impossible end, rather than that end itself...despite being motivated by a desire to achieve mimetic proximity, realism is forever aware of the impossibility of this project.”¹¹

Throughout his *oeuvre*, Tolstoy demonstrates a passion for and obsession with truth. From the very start of his career, in his 1855 short story “Sevastopol in May,” he discusses his need to communicate truth (правда) to his reader. He writes, “the hero of my tale, whom I love with all the power of my soul, whom I have tried to portray in all his beauty, who has been, is, and will be beautiful, is truth.”¹² Ernest Simmons writes that, “for Tolstoy there could be no compromise between art and truth.” However, Simmons explains that this “truth” was often “what he [Tolstoy] believed to be truth. The vaunted higher truth of art he would not accept if he found it to be at variance with what he considered the truth of life.”¹³ Thus, Tolstoy’s truth is far from mimetic. He presents a unique and personal experience of reality that he crafts in a manner

¹⁰ Molly Brunson, *Russian Realisms: Literature and Painting 1840–1890* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹² Герой же моей повести, которого я люблю всеми силами души, которого старался воспроизвести во всей красоте его, и который всегда был, есть и будет прекрасен, — правда. Tolstoi, *PSS* 4:59.

¹³ Ernest J. Simmons, *Introduction to Russian Realism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 156.

that is often self-conscious of the subjectivity and artifice of art. Tolstoy's reality is overwhelmingly visual, and his distrust of the written word caused him to reach into the realms of other media. Therefore, the literary reality that Tolstoy shares with his reader is markedly entwined with the visual arts. This dissertation follows the course of Tolstoy's changing relationship with realism as it manifests in his visual aesthetic.

II. Two Tolstoy

Much of Tolstoy scholarship identifies a significant stylistic rift between his early and late writings. The aesthetic and moral shift are often linked with his self-designated religious "conversion" of the 1870s.¹⁴ Some critics describe this divide as if, having experienced a moral epiphany, Tolstoy the moralist was born from the ashes of Tolstoy the artist. There is no denying that the later Tolstoy differs greatly from the author of *Anna Karenina* (*Анна Каренина*) (1875–1877) and *War and Peace* (*Война и мир*) (1867–1869). In fact, Tolstoy himself denounces his earlier writing as examples of "counterfeit" art in his 1897 aesthetic treatise *What is Art?* (*Что такое искусство?*). Critics like R. F. Christian view Tolstoy's later work as aesthetically inferior. In his discussion of Tolstoy's changing style, Christian rather dismissively writes that though critical opinions often shift "no serious critic would deny that Tolstoy's last novel [*Resurrection*] is a vastly inferior work of art to the two great novels which preceded it."¹⁵ Christian's assessment of the late Tolstoy is too simplistic and reductive. Instead of delving into the reasons why Tolstoy's art changes so much at the end of his career, critiques like this ignore

¹⁴ As described in his 1879 *Confession* (*Исповедь*), Tolstoy fell into a deep depression and disillusionment later in life. He rejected organized Christianity, including the Russian Orthodox Church in which he was raised, for its corruption and perversion of what he considered the true faith. He expounded his own set of beliefs which championed self-restraint, self-improvement, and passivism, and rejected religious ritual, miracles, and even the Holy Trinity. He was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901.

¹⁵ R. F. Christian, *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 221.

rich texts like the 1899 novel *Resurrection* because they do not mirror the aesthetic of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*.

In this dissertation, I examine one aspect of Tolstoy's artistic style in particular—his visual aesthetic—and the ways in which it changes and is reinvented throughout his life. Tolstoy has been called a “profoundly visual author,” whose aesthetic, according to Thomas Seifrid, “may even provide insight into the relation...between the visual and the verbal.”¹⁶ Upon examining his later fiction, it becomes clear that Tolstoy redefined his relationship with the visual, and conjured images before his readers' eyes in a very different manner. Gone were the detailed descriptions of nature, the vast panoramas, and the wide spectrum of color. Tolstoy's earlier works are more richly detailed than the later ones, which focus more on Tolstoy's ideological messages and internal realities, rather than a meticulously described external world. This is not to say that the visual is absent from later Tolstoy, but rather that it changes in nature.

Some scholars like Richard Gustafson and Rimvydas Šilbajoris challenge the notion of multiple Tolstoys, that is, Tolstoy the talented artist and the senile and aggressively devout writer of religious tracts and pedagogical works. Instead, they view the author's life and work as “distinguished by a singular kind of internal unity and consistency.”¹⁷ In a similar vein, I believe that the aesthetic shift in Tolstoy's later writing should not necessarily be interpreted as a decline in artistic quality. David Matual explains that, “while there is general agreement that Tolstoj did not cease to be an artist after his conversion, it must also be said that his artistry is evident in his religious writings as well as in his fiction.”¹⁸ Therefore, I argue that it is as if Tolstoy created his later works by relying on a different artistic medium than what he employed in his earlier works.

¹⁶ Thomas Seifrid, “Gazing on Life's Page: Perspectival Vision in Tolstoy,” *PMLA* 113 (1998), 436.

¹⁷ Rimvydas Šilbajoris, *Tolstoy's Aesthetics and His Art* (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1990), 9.

¹⁸ David Matual, “On the Poetics of Tolstoj's *Confession*,” *SEEJ* 19.3 (1975), 286.

If the aesthetic change is viewed in this sense, that is, by examining early and late works without the same set of expectations, then the reader is less inclined to find the later works inferior, just as a viewer does not dismiss a charcoal drawing because it lacks the color and dynamism of brushstroke characteristic of painting.

I borrow parts of my theoretical framework, a mode of viewing Tolstoy's work, from the visual arts in my examination of his aesthetic and compare its different incarnations with various media within the plastic arts including painting, sculpture, and drawing. Not only interested in literature, Tolstoy immersed himself in the visual and performing arts, and references paintings, operas, musical compositions, plays, and other visual media throughout his *oeuvre*. My use of visual art terms to discuss Tolstoy's aesthetic reflects the influence, conscious or unconscious, of these media on his writing. I argue that the stylistic shifts in his work stem not from the hand of a new, inferior artist, but rather from a change in the approach to art as a whole, like a painter who moves to sketching in pencil or ink for the sake of clarity and precision.

Though he speaks out against porous interart boundaries later in his life, the struggle between separating the arts and allowing visual art techniques to augment his writing was lifelong for Tolstoy. The reader can see that the balance between verbal and visual shifts constantly in his work, particularly in transitional works like *Anna Karenina*, *Confession*, and *The Death of Ivan Ilych* that see the melding of the two poles of Tolstoy's visual aesthetic that I discuss in this dissertation.

III. Spatial and Temporal Art

Tolstoy's early works feature extended descriptions, a rich color palette, fluidity and movement, and a frequently-interrupted narrative flow. I term this type of visuality Tolstoy's "painterly" aesthetic and view the 1857 short story "Lucerne" («Люцерн») as a representation

Tolstoy's most "painterly" writing. Although time and space do not permit me to pay direct attention to these works, many of Tolstoy's early works, including the collection of short stories *Sevastopol Sketches* (*Севастопольские рассказы*) of 1855 and the trilogy *Childhood, Boyhood Youth* (*Детство, отрочество юность*) of 1852–1857, exemplify this aesthetic. With time color drains from Tolstoy's work, culminating in an almost exclusively black and white color scheme in the 1899 novel *Resurrection* (*Воскресение*). Descriptions become brief and less detailed. The constrained and blunt visuality of these works mirror the later Tolstoy's self-restraint and philosophical clarity. Following his conversion, he wrote with increasing conviction and confidence about what he considered to be right and wrong. The use of contrast, the play between positive and negative space, and black and white imagery, progressively more constricting representations of space, and the increased linearity of the narrative comprise what I term Tolstoy's "draughtsmanly" aesthetic. I draw on theoretical frameworks from both the visual arts and literature to arrive at the terms "painterly" and "draughtsmanly." The interart texture of Tolstoy's work requires such an interart theory. The "painterly" category contains aspects of spatial literature and compositional technique seen in landscape painting, while the "draughtsmanly" category is a mixture of temporal literature and techniques of drawing and sculpture.

In his 1766 work *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing explores the fundamental properties of the verbal arts (poetry) and the visual arts (painting), and concludes that poetry is innately temporal, while painting is spatial. He writes that painting namely employs "forms and colors in space" and poetry uses "articulate sounds in time."¹⁹ He explains that while the poet can portray sequences of events and include any number

¹⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2005), 91.

of actions set in the past, present, or future, the painter finds himself limited to a single moment in time. Thus, the visual arts “should express nothing essentially transitory.”²⁰ Lessing argues that the fundamental properties of each medium are contradictory, and thus one medium should not attempt to do the work of the other. On this basis Lessing criticizes allegorical painting (painting that attempts narration) and pictorial poetry (literature that tries to create images with words).

In response to Lessing, Joseph Frank, in his essay “Spatial Form in Modern Literature,” explores the relationship between literature, and time and space. He does not divide the verbal and visual arts on the basis of temporality and spatiality, but rather explains how the verbal arts (literature) often feature spatial elements. Frank argues that it is possible “to trace the evolution of art forms by their oscillations between these two poles,” and that modern literature moves toward spatial form, that is, works which the authors intend to be understood in a single moment in time rather than as a sequence of events.²¹ Spatiality and temporality in literature can be discussed in terms of description and narration respectively. Authors of spatial literary works, consciously or not, combat the dominance of temporality by resisting or retarding the progression of plot of through a variety of literary devices. These include extended imagery, epiphanies, complicated syntax, incremental repetition, leitmotifs, multiple narrative lines, and defamiliarization (остранение).²² By temporarily halting the progression of plot, an author

²⁰ Ibid., 17.

²¹ Joseph Frank “Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Two Parts,” *The Sewanee Review* 53.2 (Spring, 1945), 225.

²² Jeffery R. Smitten, “Introduction: Spatial Form and Narrative Theory,” in *Spatial Form in Narrative*, ed. Jeffery R. Smitten and Ann Daghistany, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 26. Defamiliarization is a term coined by Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky. Literally meaning “making strange,” defamiliarization forces the reader to notice what he or she would normally stop to consider. Art uses different devices to make the familiar seem new and different. Shklovsky discusses defamiliarization in Tolstoy, who he argues makes the familiar strange by describing it as if he had never seen or experienced it before. See Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee Lemon and Marion Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965): 3–57.

creates moments of stasis, arresting the reader in a single moment. Jeffery Smitten and Ann Daghistany also note that the replacement of action with characterization, a slow pace, a lack of resolution, and the use of repetition are “hallmarks of spatial form.”²³

David Mickelsen, expanding upon Frank’s essay, identifies two main types of spatial forms: portraits of individual characters and tableaux of societies. He explains that the concentration on a single character involves the extensive exploration of his or her thoughts and feelings. Such spatial-form works are then “depictions of a state of mind.”²⁴ Mickelsen explains that in portraits of individual characters, the action of the story moves around them, “adding fragments of information, piecing in the portrait.”²⁵ The image of the character becomes increasingly complete, unfolding along with the narrative. Tableaux of whole social groups work in the same manner as the individual portraits, just on a larger scale. Mickelsen explains that “a large number of congruent segments make up a static whole.”²⁶

IV. Ekphrasis

Ekphrasis, what Krieger calls “the most extreme and telling instance of the visual and spatial potential of the literary medium,”²⁷ is one of the many devices Tolstoy employs to create different kinds of spatial literature. It is in an examination of *ekphrasis* in Tolstoy’s fiction that the stylistic changes between the “painterly” and “draughtsmanly” aesthetics become especially apparent. Ekphrasis, derived from the Ancient Greek *ekphrazein* (ἐκφράσις) which means to

²³ Smitten, *Spatial*, 64.

²⁴ David Mickelsen, “Types of Spatial Structure in Narrative,” in *Spatial Form in Narrative*, ed. Jeffery R. Smitten and Ann Daghistany, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 70.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 6.

describe (literally to speak out),²⁸ as a rhetorical device has come to mean in its most basic sense, the description of a work of the plastic arts in a work of literature. This is what James Hefferman calls “the verbal representation of visual representation.”²⁹ However, as in the definition of realism, a great deal of scholarly debate surrounds this deceptively simple concept.

Hefferman separates ekphrasis from pictorialism, which he defines as the verbal generation of “effects similar to those created by pictures...representing the world with the aid of pictorial techniques...not representing pictures themselves,” and iconicity, which he describes as “a visual resemblance between the arrangement of words or letters on a page and what they signify.”³⁰ Critics like Murray Krieger and Valerie Robillard take a broader view. Krieger expands his definition of ekphrasis to include “word-painting,” which can be traced along a spectrum of “spatial and visual emulation in words,”³¹ and Robillard creates a typology to differentiate strong and explicit ekphrases from instances in which there is a more “nebulous” relationship with the pictorial source, instances that could otherwise be termed pictorial.³²

Tamar Yacobi explains that ekphrasis should be used as an umbrella term “that subsumes various forms of rendering the visual object in words.”³³ As Yacobi suggests, many scholars divide ekphrasis into subcategories. For example, John Hollander differentiates between ekphrasis and what he calls “notional ekphrasis,” that is, the description of a fictional work of art

²⁸ Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 18 n.34.

²⁹ James Hefferman, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3.

³⁰ James Hefferman, “Ekphrasis and Representation,” *New Literary History* 22.2 (spring, 1991), 300.

³¹ Krieger, 7.

³² Valerie Robillard, “In Pursuit of Ekphrasis: An Intertextual Approach,” in Valerie Robillard, and Els Jongeneel eds., *Pictures into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1998), 60.

³³ Tamar Yacobi, “The Ekphrastic Model: Forms and Functions,” in Valerie Robillard, and Els Jongeneel eds., *Pictures into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1998), 23.

or an actual but “totally lost” work of art,³⁴ and, in her typology, Robillard identifies four types of ekphrasis. These include what she terms “depictive ekphrastic texts” that come the closest to a representation or recreation of their visual sources, “attributive ekphrastic texts” which in some way identify the visual source either by naming directly or alluding to an artist, style, or genre, “associative ekphrastic texts,” which refer to ideas and/or structural, thematic, and theoretical conventions associated with the visual arts, and “temporal ekphrastic texts,” in which the author brings up the memory of a work of visual art in the context of another work of art.

Claus Clüver and Murray Krieger both draw on semiotics in their examinations of ekphrasis. For Clüver, ekphrasis is “the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system,”³⁵ while Krieger sees ekphrasis as an attempt in literature to give the illusion that is “performing a task we usually associate with an art of natural signs.”³⁶ Krieger defines the natural sign, in opposition to the arbitrary sign system of language, as a sign that is to be taken as a visual substitute for its referent.³⁷ The arbitrary sign of a word is further removed from its signified as it is a group of graphic symbols that do not resemble the referent, while a natural sign, though still a representation of the referent, in actuality resembles the signified. Looking at Saussure’s visual deconstruction of a sign (**Figure 1**), it is apparent that the image of the tree brings the reader/viewer closer to the concept of an actual tree than does the word. In seeking to recreate the natural sign, ekphrastic texts are attempts to get closer to reality than the arbitrary signs of language can allow. The author tries to conjure images in the reader’s mind, allowing him/her to experience the object of description immediately, almost completely

³⁴ John Hollander, “The Poetics of Ekphrasis,” *Word and Image* 4.1 (1988), 209.

³⁵ Claus Clüver, “Quotation, Enargeia, and the Functions of Ekphrasis,” in Valerie Robillard, and Els Jongeneel eds., *Pictures into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1998), 36.

³⁶ Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

bypassing the device's linguistic medium. This vividness of description is sometimes referred to as *enargeia*.

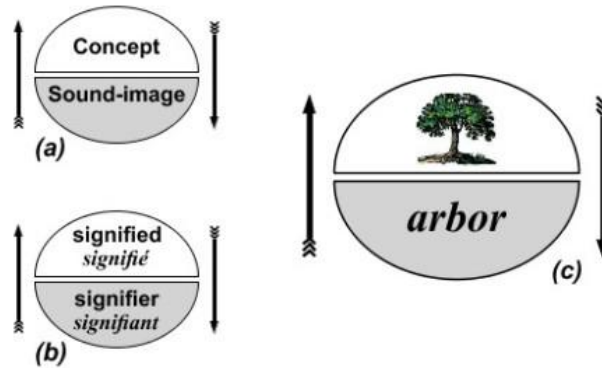


Figure 1 Ferdinand de Saussure's pictorial representation of the sign.

Some definitions differentiate ekphrasis from *enargeia*, while others designate the latter as the foundation of ekphrasis. *Enargeia* is a rhetorical device that entails vivid description, which reproduces the described image before the mind's eye of the reader. Krieger links *enargeia* and ekphrasis through their spatial qualities. He suggests that, during late classicism, there was a search for a device that would “break into and halt the temporal flow of discourse by forcing us to pause over an extended verbal picture.”³⁸ Thus ekphrasis grew out of this call for *enargeia*. Both devices succeed in slowing or stopping that which drives the development and progression of plot, what Krieger calls *energia*.³⁹

Tolstoy employs a wide spectrum of ekphrases in his fiction, often using a variety of ekphrastic categories within a single work. Tolstoyan ekphrases range from the most traditional and explicit variety, for example the description of François Gérard's 1810 portrait of Napoleon

³⁸ Ibid., 68.

³⁹ Ibid., 76.

II (*Le Roi de Rome*) (**Figure 7**) that appears in *War and Peace*, to the most abstract version of ekphrasis, or “word-painting” that characterizes the landscape descriptions in “Lucerne.”

Tolstoy’s use of ekphrasis in its many incarnations relates to his uncertainty of the written word’s ability to communicate the truth of reality to the reader. As Smith notes, “ekphrases within key realist texts are used to foreground linguistic debates over the truth-claims of referential and linguistic paradigms, making language their primary theme.”⁴⁰ Thus Tolstoy’s use of ekphrasis simultaneously interrogates the very medium that the device traditionally attempts to bypass. Ekphrasis, what Krieger calls “the most extreme and telling instance of the visual and spatial potential of the literary medium,”⁴¹ is one of the many devices Tolstoy employs to create spatial literature. Different types of ekphrasis appear at different stages in Tolstoy’s work, and demonstrate the manner in which he understands representation and realism at the time. “Lucerne” features abstract “word painting” which helps communicate Nekhliudov’s emotional state and thought process. This type of realism is similar to the hurried brush strokes of Courbet that give the work a sense of immediacy. *War and Peace* features the most concrete ekphrasis, which pairs with Tolstoy’s attempt to recreate reality as truthfully as possible. From *Anna Karenina* forward, Tolstoy uses a mixture of ekphrastic techniques, less for the depiction of reality, either physical or emotional, and more to communicate a moral message to the reader.

Tolstoy relies less and less on the creation of natural signs in his later work, which demonstrates a growing confidence in the written word as it relates to his new understanding of reality. Tolstoy’s late realism does not prioritize visual verisimilitude or traditional mimesis. Instead, the aim is to effectively communicate Tolstoy’s own understanding and experience of

⁴⁰ Mack Smith, *Literary Realism and the Ekphrastic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 12.

⁴¹ Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 6.

reality to the reader. Reality for the late Tolstoy is rooted more in one's feelings and internal experiences than in representations that recreate the physical world around us. The message of a work becomes Tolstoy's new reality.

This dissertation consists of four chapters that examine Tolstoy's major works chronologically from 1857 to 1899. It identifies major devices used in what I term Tolstoy's "painterly" aesthetic, most prominent in his earlier work, and those devices and stylistic elements that define his later, "draughtsmanly" aesthetic. I use a synthesis of theoretical approaches from the visual and literary arts to analyze general trends in Tolstoy's visual aesthetic as they relate to his moral and philosophical worldview. Tracing the dialectic between "painterly" and "draughtsmanly" aesthetics throughout his literary career illuminates the nuances in his later work that are so often overlooked. I hope that viewing Tolstoy's work as a slow and steady shift in medium will counter the argument that he experiences a stylistic schism after his conversion, which leads to inferior works of art.

In chapter one the analysis of the 1857 short story "Lucerne" and the 1899 novel *Resurrection* reveals the visual aesthetic poles in Tolstoy's writing against which I measure his other works. The chapter identifies the major aspects of Tolstoy's "painterly" aesthetic which abound in "Lucerne." In opposition, the analysis of *Resurrection* investigates the most prominent aspects of his "draughtsmanly" aesthetic. I show how these two styles reflect Tolstoy's philosophical and ethical worldview at the time the works were written.

Chapter two examines *War and Peace* and traces the development and expansion of the "painterly" aspects seen in "Lucerne" in the context of the novel, including analyses of the first appearances of various types of ekphrasis in Tolstoy's work. I view Tolstoy's engagement with

various visual art techniques in the novel, in part as his attempt to augment his depiction of reality through the arbitrary sign system of language in his creation of natural signs. I discuss Tolstoy's reluctance to adhere to the plot norms traditional to the novel genre, and how this plotlessness relates to his presentation of time as cyclical. I argue that different types of ekphrasis halt the reader in time in the work, forcing him or her to focus more on Tolstoy's representations of space. I compare these self-contained moments to different works of art in a gallery, through which the reader-viewer can move linearly or laterally.

Chapter three designates *Anna Karenina* as an aesthetic and philosophical turning point for Tolstoy. It shows how some "painterly" devices fade from prominence, while others, particularly ekphrasis, become increasingly important. I discuss the changes in plot progression from *War and Peace* to *Anna Karenina*, the differences in landscape and nature descriptions, portraits of characters, and the overt discussion of art in its various media. It is in the writing of *Anna Karenina*, that certain aspects of Tolstoy's later aesthetic appear, such as more traditional plot progression, more concise descriptions of people and places, and ekphrastic passages that deal not only with the moral messages of the novel, but also with Tolstoy's own ideas about art itself.

Chapter four investigates the beginnings of this new attitude toward and depiction of reality in Tolstoy's post-conversion works represented by *Confession* (1879) and *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (1886). If *Anna Karenina* is a point of transition for Tolstoy, I argue then that in *Confession* he writes from a point of aesthetic Limbo, stuck between tendencies to create as he had in earlier works and a passionate desire to renounce superfluous detail and literary language in favor of a simplified, accessible, and didactic style. *Ivan Ilych* features many aspects of this stark aesthetic and simplified language. However, further analysis of the work shows that the

message Tolstoy communicates to the reader is still in flux in the author's mind. It is not until later works, demonstrated in this dissertation by *Resurrection*, that the black and white aesthetic and moral message merge.

My project is the first in the field to explore visual art techniques in Tolstoy. It examines several of his major works in a new context and reevaluates his later writing that is often dismissed as aesthetically inferior to his earlier literature. The aim of separating Tolstoy's visual aesthetic into two poles is not to reduce him to a set of binaries, but rather to measure the shifts of his stylistics along a visual yardstick which shows the gradual progression of his visuality from "painterly" to "draughtsmanly." I pair this discussion of his changing visual aesthetic with an examination of the evolution of his personal moral and religious worldview. I note that the growing restrictive nature of his thought is reflected in the increasingly stark and achromatic style of his prose.

CHAPTER ONE

Tolstoy's Aesthetic Extremes: "Lucerne" and *Resurrection*

The sight of this painting, which he had been struggling with for the last two years, and the sketches, and the whole studio reminded him of an impression he had become increasingly aware of in recent times, a sense of his inability to make any more headway in the field of art.

(Вид этой картины, над которой он бился два года, и этюдов и всей мастерской напомнили ему испытанное с особенной силой в последнее время чувство бессилия идти дальше в живописи. Он объяснял это чувство слишком тонко развитым эстетическим чувством, но всё-таки сознание это было очень неприятно).

Lev Tolstoy, *Resurrection* (1899)⁴²

In this chapter I discuss the 1857 short story "Lucerne" (Люцерн) and the 1899 novel *Resurrection* (*Воскресение*) and argue that these works can be seen as two ends of the same manuscript, one that explores the emotional, psychological, and moral shifts in their shared protagonist, Prince Dmitri Nekhliudov, and reflects similar changes and their aesthetic incarnations in Tolstoy. I identify two extremes of Tolstoy's visual aesthetic, the earlier "painterly" style of "Lucerne" and the later "draughtsmanly" style of *Resurrection*, which not only mark two points in Tolstoy's *oeuvre* aesthetically, but chronologically as well. In the juxtaposition of the two extremes of Tolstoy's art and thought, this chapter frames the dissertation as a whole, and sets up two ends of a spectrum upon which the aesthetic gradations of *War and Peace* (chapter two), *Anna Karenina* (chapter three), and *Confession* and *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (chapter four) will be measured.

"Lucerne" features many qualities of spatial literature, such as extended description, a limited number of settings, portraits and tableaux of characters, and a frequently-interrupted narrative flow. These spatial forms, when added to the story's rich color palette and numerous

⁴² Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, 20 [Tolstoi, PSS, 32:17].

instances of associative ekphrasis (painting with words), are what make “Lucerne” so exemplary of Tolstoy’s “painterly” work. In *Resurrection*, the novel’s plethora of visual contrasts, short ekphrastic passages, and achromatic palette combined with qualities of temporal art such as a traditional linear progression of plot, the importance of time and plot events, and the lack of lengthy narrative-disrupting descriptions are defining features of the work’s “draughtsmanly” aesthetic.

The protagonist and narrator of “Lucerne,” Dmitri Nekhliudov, whom Justin Weir calls “a stand-in for Tolstoy himself,” appears intermittently throughout Tolstoy’s fictional works, for example as Nikolenka Irtenev’s friend in *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*.⁴³ Nekhliudov shares biographical and ideological elements with his creator, but it is important to remember that he is not a mirror image of Tolstoy. It is interesting that this autobiographical character bookends Tolstoy’s aesthetic, giving continuity to an *oeuvre* that scholars often divide into distinct periods. I would suggest that Nekhliudov reappears in *Resurrection* as a vehicle through which Tolstoy can reevaluate his earlier work and self.

The Nekhliudov of 1899 abandons his passionate defense of the arts as well as his interest in landscape painting just as Tolstoy renounces his earlier works and discards many of the stylistic elements he used to create them. The focus in “Lucerne” lies on Nekhliudov’s search for morality, a process characterized by internal movement. This fluidity and dynamism is reflected in his painterly descriptions of the natural world that also feature an abundance of movement and color. In an almost Romantic use of the pathetic fallacy, Nekhliudov’s external surroundings echo his internal struggle. In *Resurrection*, time plays an important role for the characters. The return of their past, particularly for Nekhliudov and Maslova, colors their present

⁴³ Weir, *Alibi*, 127.

and determines their future. The narrator draws the reader's attention to the Nekhliudov's and Maslova's internal realities including their clear-cut understanding of right and wrong, depicted in singular, stark images or color divisions. Ideologically and aesthetically, Tolstoy lays down his painter's brush to retrace and reshape the outlines of his early fiction with the clarity and precision of a draughtsman's pen.

I. Lucerne: It was not a song, but a light, masterly sketch of a song...

Tolstoy imbues his short story "Lucerne" with vivid descriptions of the Swiss landscape. He does not arbitrarily list details of the surrounding nature for the sake of mimesis, but rather uses a series of images to help illustrate each scene as a cohesive whole. The short story contains many features of spatial literature including static motifs, open forms, portraits of characters and tableaux of society at large, a heavy reliance on description rather than action, and a sequence of plot events which Tolstoy often interrupts with instances of extended imagery that are often examples of associative ekphrasis, detailed descriptions, and repetition. As Brooks notes, "plot is the thread of design and its active shaping force, the product of our refusal to allow temporality to be meaningless."⁴⁴ Thus Tolstoy's consistent disruption of the plot directly inhibits the temporal organization common in works of literature. The full title of the short story "From the Notes of Prince D. Nekhliudov. Lucerne," calls more attention to the incomplete and interrupted quality of the plot. Weir calls notes (записки) "the most unspecific, casual and less circumscribed type of written text," and explains that the title (из записок) "further stresses the fragmentariness" of the story.⁴⁵ The spatial aspects of "Lucerne" link the story to the visual arts, a connection which becomes stronger through Tolstoy's emphasis on visual elements, reliance

⁴⁴ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 323.

⁴⁵ Weir, *Alibi*, 126.

on visual art techniques such as line and color, and his use of terminology associated with painting and drawing. The setting plays a large role in the spatial nature of the story as well.

Tolstoy locates his short story in a single place, the Swiss town Lucerne. In all, the action occurs in only two physical spaces, the majority of which are in dining room of the elegant, five-story Schweizerhof hotel. One scene, when Nekhliudov meets the singer, takes place on the streets of the town. After they meet, Nekhliudov and the musician return to the hotel. Unlike in his other works, Tolstoy limits himself to almost a single location in “Lucerne.” The focus is on description rather than plot, and by indulging in long descriptions of the landscape, people, architecture, and providing generous commentary on the narrator’s emotional response to these visual stimuli, Tolstoy arrests the reader in a very small span of time. The limit on time throws the balance in favor of space. To borrow terminology from Boris Tomashevsky’s “Thematics,” I argue that “Lucerne” features many static motifs, including the setting. Tomashevsky explains setting can be either static or dynamic, and, “if static, all the characters gather in one place.”⁴⁶ This is precisely what occurs in the majority of scenes in “Lucerne.” Characters congregate in a limited number of spaces throughout the story.

In addition to his focus on space, Tolstoy draws attention to the limited action of the story in another way. He spends nineteen pages describing the events that took place at the Schweizerhof hotel only to summarize them in a single paragraph (italics are Tolstoy’s):

On the seventh of July 1857, in Lucerne, in front of the Hotel Schweizerhof in which the richest people stay, an itinerant beggar singer sang and played the guitar for half an hour. About a hundred people listened to him. The singer asked them all three times to give him something. Not one of them gave him anything, and many people laughed at him.

Седьмого июля 1857 года в Люцерне перед отелем Швейцергофом, в котором останавливаются самые богатые люди, странствующий нищий певец в продолжение полчаса пел песни и играл на

⁴⁶ Boris Tomashevsky, “Thematics,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, translated by Lee Lemon and Marion Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1956), 78.

гитаре. Около ста человек слушало его. Певец три раза просил всех дать ему что-нибудь. Ни один человек не дал ему ничего, и многие смеялись над ним.⁴⁷

By including a brief and unadorned chronological retelling of the plot as a point of comparison with his vividly detailed tale with visual and philosophical digressions, Tolstoy demonstrates Eikhenbaum's claim that the technique of plot (*siuzhetologiya*) in the author's early work remains "peripheral."⁴⁸

Christian explains that "the incident is inflated into a story and then deflated again into a paragraph at the end of it, as though implying that the content of the story could really be expressed in a few lines."⁴⁹ I distinguish content from plot and find that this inflation and deflation of the incident shows the minimal role of plot in the story, which constitutes only a fraction of the story's content, and is far outweighed by the importance of descriptive elements. Eikhenbaum notes that "Tolstoi's first literary ideas are not connected with any plot schemes, but belong to the descriptive genre" and identifies the absence of "storyline" (фабула). He defines фабула as "the temporal-casual sequence of events in a narration."⁵⁰ I would add that "Lucerne" is not completely devoid of "storyline," but rather, includes a small number of plot events, the linear progression of which Tolstoy repeatedly interrupts.

Tolstoy stops the reader from moving forward in the story, regulating him or her to the present moment with long and meticulous descriptions of the setting and characters. Christian writes that, in "Lucerne" "the *ex-cathedra* statements are the prerogative of the journalist, not the artist. There is no characterization. The singer is given no identity."⁵¹ However, again, it is necessary to distinguish between the visual and verbal. Just as plot comes second to setting,

⁴⁷ Tolstoy, "Lucerne," 51 [Tolstoi, *PSS* 5:23]. The italics are Tolstoy's.

⁴⁸ Eikhenbaum, *Young Tolstoi*, 30.

⁴⁹ Christian, *Critical Introduction*, 86.

⁵⁰ Eikhenbaum, *Young Tolstoi*, 24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

physical description is more prominent than psychological or emotional character development. Tolstoy does not give the singer an identity traditional to well-developed literary figures, but rather paints a detailed physical portrait of the artist for the reader. His identity is not absent but must be seen rather than read. As Richard Gustafson argues, the first-person narration used in “Lucerne” makes it “clear that the purpose of the tale is not the telling of the event but the sharing of the view on the event...the image attempts to accomplish what later the idea will do.”⁵²

Due to the pauses in the plot progression, “Lucerne” can be described as the synthesis of various verbal portraits, landscape paintings, and societal tableaux. David Mickelsen identifies such portraits and tableaux as two main types of spatial forms. He explains that in portraits of individual characters, the action of the story moves around them, “adding fragments of information, piecing in the portrait.”⁵³ The image of the character becomes increasingly complete, unfolding along with the narrative. Tableaux of whole social groups work in the same manner as the individual portraits, just on a larger scale. Mickelsen writes that “a large number of congruent segments make up a static whole.”⁵⁴

Tolstoy uses color and line to divide the world of “Lucerne” into two. For example, he paints the English guests at the hotel in shades of white. A sea of white images overwhelms Nekhliudov when he surveys the hotel dining room: “on all sides the whitest of laces, the whitest of collars, the whitest of natural and artificial teeth, and the whitest of complexions and hands...and the whitest of hands in gloves with rings on moved only to adjust a collar, to cut up

⁵² Richard F. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 26.

⁵³ Mickelsen, “Spatial Structure,” 70.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

beef, or to lift a wine glass.”⁵⁵ He directs the reader’s attention to the whiteness of the English again when, a few pages later, he comments on “gentlemen with the whitest of collars...[and] cooks in the whitest of caps and blouses.”⁵⁶ In his description of the guests and their surroundings, Tolstoy focuses exclusively on visual elements instead of personality traits, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. The extended imagery within this description along with the repetition of the adjective whitest (белейший) not only halts the progression of plot events in the story, but also creates a tableau of society as defined by Mickelsen.⁵⁷

Tolstoy employs color, in this case white, and line to link his tableau of English society with civilization as whole.

Neither on the lake nor on the mountains, not in the sky, was there a single precise line, or one precise colour, or one unchanging moment: everywhere was motion, irregularity, fantastic shapes, an endless intermingling and variety of shades and lines, and over it all lay tranquility, softness, unity, and the inevitability of the beautiful. And here, before my very window, amid this undefined, confused, unfettered beauty, the straight white line of the quay stretched stupidly and artificially, with its lime trees, their supports, and the green benches—miserable, vulgar human productions which did not blend with the general harmony of the beauty as did the distant chalets and ruins, but on the contrary clashed coarsely with it. My eyes continually encountered that dreadfully straight quay, and I felt a desire to push it away or demolish it, as I would wipe off a black smudge I could see on my nose. But the embankment with the English people walking about on it remained where it was.

Ни на озере, ни на горах, ни на небе ни одной цельной линии, ни одного цельного цвета, ни одного одинакового момента, везде движение, несимметричность, причудливость, бесконечная смесь и разнообразие теней и линий, и во всем спокойствие, мягкость, единство и необходимость прекрасного. И тут, среди неопределенной, запутанной свободной красоты, перед самым моим окном, глупо, фокусно торчала белая палка набережной, липки с подпорками и зеленые лавочки, — бедные, пошлые людские произведения, не утонувшие так, как дальние дачи и развалины, в общей гармонии красоты, а, напротив, грубо противоречащие ей. Беспреданно, невольно мой взгляд сталкивался с этой ужасно прямой линией набережной и мысленно хотел оттолкнуть, уничтожить ее, как черное пятно, которое сидит на носу под глазом; но набережная с гуляющими англичанами оставалась на месте.⁵⁸

He juxtaposes the rigidity, pallor, and lifelessness of the quay, which represents civilization, with the movement, color, and imprecision of the natural world. The quay disfigures the face of the

⁵⁵ Со всех сторон блестят белейшие кружева, белейшие воротнички, белейшие настоящие и вставные зубы, белейшие лица и руки...и белейшие руки с перстнями и в митенях движутся только для поправления воротничков, разрезывания говядины и наливания вина в стаканы. Tolstoy, “Lucerne,” 34 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 5:5].

⁵⁶ Господа с белейшими воротниками... [и] повара в белейших колпаках и куртках. *Ibid.*, 37 [5:9].

⁵⁷ Mickelsen, “Spatial Structure,” 70.

⁵⁸ Tolstoy, “Lucerne,” 33 [Tolstoi, *PSS* 5:4].

landscape around it like a scar. Later in the story, Tolstoy again uses line to show the artificial and divisive relations of civilization with the natural world. Nekhliudov ruminates on the events he witnessed in Lucerne, including their relation to the concept and practice of equality, Western civilization versus the “undeveloped” societies of the rest of the world, and man’s desire for order and control. He explains that, as a result of this need for order, “men have made subdivisions for themselves...they have traced imaginary lines on that ocean, and expect the ocean to divide itself accordingly, as if there were not millions of other subdivisions made from quite other points on another plane.”⁵⁹ Tolstoy repeats the image of an unnatural, man-made line dividing nature into segments. The straight, white quay fractures the landscape in the same way the imaginary borders of different nations sever the globe.

Just as Tolstoy’s descriptions of characters and social groups resemble portraits, the composition of his nature descriptions is consistent with that of traditional landscape paintings. This reference to the structural and thematic conventions associated with landscape painting is exemplary of associative ekphrasis. One aspect of composition in painting and photography, “the rule of thirds,” is the division of the picture plane into thirds both vertically and horizontally. The horizontal divisions correspond to what are called the first, middle, and far plans (первый план, средний план, дальний план or задний план). As G. M. Shegal’ notes, looking at paintings since the Renaissance, particularly landscapes, “all the space of the painting is clearly divided into three zones: the foreground is brown, second is green and third, the most distant, blue.”⁶⁰ Shegal’ explains that these color divisions are, of course, general. Moving from foreground to

⁵⁹ Сделали себе подразделения... провели воображаемые черты по этому морю и ждут, что море так и разделится. Ibid., 53 [5:24–25].

⁶⁰ Все пространство картины четко делится на три зоны: первый план – коричневый, второй – зеленый и третий, самый дальний, – голубой. G. M. Shegal’, “Kolorit i prostranstvo,” in *Kolorit v zhivopisi: zametki khudozhnika* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1957).

background colors shift from “warm” (горячие) tones such as reds, browns, and oranges to “cooler” (холоднее) ones like blues, grays, and purples. There is one moment in “Lucerne” which closely corresponds to this structure and is worth quoting at length:

The lake, light-blue like burning sulfur, and dotted with little boats which left vanishing tracks behind them, seemed motionless, smooth, and convex before my windows, while it spread out between its variegated green shores, then passed into the distance where it narrowed between two enormous promontories, and, darkening, leaned against and disappeared among the pile of mountains, clouds, and glaciers that towered one above the other. In the foreground were the moist, fresh-green, far-stretching shores with their reeds, meadows, gardens, and chalets; further off were the dark-green wooded promontories crowned by ruined castles; in the background was the rugged, purple-white distance with its fantastic, rocky, dull-white, snow-covered mountain crests, the whole bathed in the delicate, transparent azure of the lair and lit up by warm sunset rays that pierced torn clouds.

Голубое, как горящая сера, озеро, с точками лодок и их пропадающими следами, неподвижно, гладко, как будто выпукло расстиралось перед окнами между разнообразными зелеными берегами, уходило вперед, сжимаясь между двумя громадными уступами, и, темнея, упиралось и исчезало в нагроможденных друг на друге долинах, горах, облаках и льдинах. На первом плане мокрые светло-зеленые разбегающиеся берега с тростником, лугами, садами и дачами; далее темно-зеленые поросшие уступы с развалинами замков; на дне скомканная бело-лиловая горная даль с причудливыми скалистыми и бело-матовыми снеговыми вершинами; и всё залитое нежной, прозрачной лазурью воздуха и освещенное прорвавшимися с разорванного неба жаркими лучами заката.⁶¹

Tolstoy uses color and line to give his description of the Swiss landscape a tripartite structure. He designates three separate planes and uses the term foreground (первый план). Like the carefully planned lines in a painting, Tolstoy guides his reader’s eye across the landscape. One feature of the scene bleeds into the next, drawing the reader-viewer from the lake to the mountains, to the shore, and back to the scene as a whole. Each of the three major planes in the description feature the color schemes traditional to the first, middle, and far plans in painting. Tolstoy uses the play of color, line, light, and shadow to give the picture fluidity. Rays of light pierce the clouds, and caps of snow highlight areas in the landscape, helping to break it up. Tolstoy creates movement without relying on forward progression in the plot. Nekhludov does

⁶¹ Tolstoy, “Lucerne,” 33, [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 5:3].

not walk around the lake or down the shore. He is stationary before his window, the outlines of which act as a frame for Tolstoy's verbal painting.

Tolstoy presents the musician to his readers in a series of vignettes. Nekhliudov notes how "the lonely figure of the man in black against the fantastic background of the dark lake, the gleaming moon, the two tall spires silently stretching upwards, and the black poplars in the garden, were all strangely but inexpressibly beautiful."⁶² In a similar instance Tolstoy uses visual art terms to describe the traveling musician's song. Nekhliudov remarks, "it was not a song, but the light, masterly sketch of a song. I could not make out what it was, but it was beautiful."⁶³ In both scenes Tolstoy's narrator recognizes his inability to convey the beauty of the scene through language alone. He uses the written word to describe the piece of music but turns to the visual to express the emotional impression that the verbal cannot completely convey.

Tolstoy also uses visual images to illustrate the effect the music has on Nekhliudov. Though he describes the music as "sweet and agreeable" (приятная и милая), with a tune that was "something in the nature of a charming and graceful mazurka," and notes how "the voices sometimes seemed nearer and sometimes farther away; now you could hear a tenor, now a bass, and now a guttural falsetto with a warbling Tyrolese yodel," the music makes Nekhliudov focus on the beauty of his surroundings.⁶⁴ "My dormant attention was again alive to all the objects surrounding me, the beauty of the night and of the lake...I involuntarily noticed both the heavy grey patches of cloud on the dark blue of the sky lit up by the rising moon, the smooth dark-

⁶² Эта одинокая фигурка черного человечка среди фантастической обстановки темного озера, просвечивающей луны и молчаливо возвышающихся двух громадных шпицев башен и черных раин сада, всё было странно, но невыразимо прекрасно. Ibid., 37 [5:8].

⁶³ Это была не песня, а легкий мастерской эскиз песни. Я не мог понять, что это такое. Ibid.

⁶⁴ Тема была что-то в роде милой и грациозной мазурки...Голоса казались то близки, то далеки, то слышался тенор, то бас, то горловая фистула с воркующими тирольскими переливами. Ibid., 36 [5:7].

green lake with the little lights reflected on it, and the mist-covered mountains in the distance.”⁶⁵

Tolstoy focuses on the visual elements surrounding Nekhliudov in another example of a landscape divided by color and plane. Though the three sections mentioned in the description do not correspond with the foreground, middle ground, and background like in the first landscape description, Tolstoy still divides the scene into three parts, reminiscent of the “rule of thirds.” Each section of the image is dominated by a different color palette: the sky by grays and dark blues, the lake by greens, and the mountains by the whites of moonlit mist.

Tolstoy includes another verbal painting almost directly after the one described above. Instead of a sequence of events, the author presents a series of images to communicate his ideas to the reader. Nekhliudov continues his description of the evening, noting “directly in front of me... I saw amid the semi-darkness a throng of people collected in a half-circle in the middle of the road, and at some short distance from them a tiny man in black clothes. Behind the people and the man the black poplars in the garden were gracefully silhouetted on the dark grey and blue ragged sky, and the severe spires on each side of the ancient cathedral towered majestically.”⁶⁶ In this second image of the musician, Tolstoy again uses the three-plane structure seen in his earlier landscape descriptions. In structuring the passage in this way, Tolstoy orients his readers in front of the scene as if viewing a painting in a gallery. Like a painter, he chooses a specific perspective, unifies the visual impression through his color palette, and uses

⁶⁵ Заснувшее внимание мое снова устремилось на все окружающие предметы. И красота ночи и озера... Я невольно в одно мгновение успел заметить и пасмурное, серыми кусками на темной синеве, небо, освещенное поднимающимся месяцем, и темно-зеленое гладкое озеро с отражающимися в нем огоньками, и вдали мглистые горы. Ibid.

⁶⁶ Прямо же передо мной... я увидал в полумраке на середине улицы полукругом стеснившуюся толпу народа, а перед толпой, в некотором расстоянии, крошечного человека в черной одежде. Сзади толпы и человечка, на темном сером и синем разорванном небе, стройно отделялось несколько черных раин сада и величаво возвышались по обеим сторонам старинного собора два строгие шпица башен. Ibid.

other visual elements to frame the image and create a scale by which the viewer can gauge the size of the figures.

Tolstoy situates elements in his scene in a manner that creates visual balance and a natural frame. In the bottom of the picture plane, “directly in from of me” (прямо же передо мной) as Nekhliudov explains, there stands a crowd of people in a half-circle. The silhouettes of poplar trees and “the severe spires on each side of the ancient cathedral” form the background of the picture. The “tiny man in black clothes” appears framed by the group of people and the cluster of trees, composing the point of focus for Tolstoy’s visual scene.⁶⁷ To create balance, Tolstoy offsets the horizontal lines formed by the rows of trees and the semi-circle of the crowd by including the sharp vertical elements in the cathedral spires.

Though Tolstoy carefully choreographs the various visual components of the landscapes in “Lucerne,” spaces in the short story are not constricted or small. In separating landscape scenes into the traditional three planes seen in painting, allowing the colors and lines of the different elements to flow together creating movement, and in strategically separating certain objects and figures with space, light, shadow, and size, Tolstoy creates a verbal *trompe l’oeil*. The landscape descriptions simultaneously feature spatial depth and a controlled aesthetic unity.

The handling of visuality and depictions of space in “Lucerne” speak to the author’s philosophical ideas at the time. Throughout his life, Tolstoy’s philosophy greatly informed his fiction. As Gustafson notes, “in literature and even in philosophy he [Tolstoy] sought ‘only the soul, the mind, the character of the person writing.’”⁶⁸ The young Tolstoy, only 29 years old

⁶⁷ По обеим сторонам старинного собора два строгие шпица башен... крошечный человек в черной одежде. Ibid., 36 [5:7–8].

⁶⁸ Gustafson, *Resident and Stranger*, 22. The quote Gustafson uses is taken from a letter written to Nikolai Nikolaevich Strakhov on September 3, 1892. The original Russian original is as follows: “... душу только, ум, характер человека пишущего.” [Tolstoi, PSS 66:254].

when he published “Lucerne,” experienced a strong urge to love and be loved by his fellow man. Not yet ensnared by the inevitability of death that would haunt him in later years, Tolstoy writes of “the harmonious need of the eternal and infinite” (гармоническая потребность вечного и бесконечного), the beginning of life’s spiritual and moral journey, and the seemingly endless potential of youth.⁶⁹ These feelings find their voice in Nekhliudov. Looking out at the vast Swiss landscape from his window, he explains how he suddenly felt the need to express “an excess of something” (избыток чего-то) in his soul.⁷⁰ The expanse of the landscape “becomes an image of the whole universe, the harmonious world in which he would dwell.”⁷¹

In the short time frame of “Lucerne” Nekhliudov describes a number of strong emotional and intellectual reactions to various stimuli in the hotel and town. He begins the short story overwhelmed with a thirst for life, community, and fraternal love, colored by his youthful optimism. Once in the hotel dining room, frustration, anger, and hatred replace Nekhliudov’s earlier exuberance. He vacillates between feeling proud for, what he felt was protecting the poor singer, and self-loathing for his own “petty indignation at the waiters.”⁷² He ruminates at length on a number of moral issues including equality, the tension between instinct and rationality, the nature of art, and even the evils of human nature demonstrated by the violent act of imperialist nations. Nekhliudov’s varied ethical musings create in “Lucerne” what Mickelsen terms an “open-form” narrative. Open-form works focus on the exploration of different ideas and beliefs, while closed-form works assert a specific idea or belief. Tolstoy’s use of open-forms in his narrative corresponds with his depiction of open spaces. With time both the “form” of his

⁶⁹ Tolstoy, “Lucerne,” 54 [Tolstoi, PSS 5:26].

⁷⁰ Ibid., 33 [5:4].

⁷¹ Gustafson, *Resident and Stranger*, 23.

⁷² Маленькое, пошленькое негодование на лакеев. Tolstoy, “Lucerne,” 54. [Tolstoi, PSS 5:26].

narrative and the depictions of physical spaces in his work shift from “open” and expansive to “closed” and constricted.

As Tolstoy grows older and his thinking evolves, the world seems smaller and time less infinite. When the fear of impending death takes more of a hold on him, representations of space in Tolstoy’s fiction become smaller and tighter. With Nekhliudov as his guide, Tolstoy moves from the color and seeming infinity of the Swiss landscape in “Lucerne” to the prison cells and stuffy courtrooms of *Resurrection*. The treatment of space, inevitably linked with the visual (spatial) aspects of Tolstoy’s fiction, changes alongside the author’s spiritual, moral, and philosophical evolution. The reliance on the visual remains a constant throughout Tolstoy’s writing, as the following discussion of *Resurrection* will show, moving from the fluidity, expanse, and color of a “painterly” style to the control, austerity, and achromaticity of a “draughtsmanly” aesthetic.

II. *Resurrection*: An unfinished painting turned back to front on the easel...

In *Resurrection*, Tolstoy does not linger on descriptions as he does in “Lucerne,” but rather provides his reader with the bare necessities to visualize a scene. Though the work is not devoid of description, it does lack the verbal landscapes and portraits of Tolstoy’s earlier works. In novels like *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina*, he provides detailed accounts of a character’s physical appearance before he emphasizes one or two eventually metonymic physical traits or visual epithets. In his later work, Tolstoy provides a basic outline, sometimes only focusing on a character’s defining trait. Donna Orwin calls the reader “an apprentice, filling in cartoons sketched by the master.”⁷³ She suggests that the limited or unfinished descriptions account for

⁷³ Donna Orwin, “The Riddle of Prince Nekhliudov,” *SEEJ* 30.4 (Winter, 1986), 483.

the exceptional “vividness” of certain scenes. She likens this descriptive technique to the “unfinished quality” of sculptor P. Trubetskoi, whom Tolstoy greatly admired.⁷⁴

I suggest that the visual art techniques Tolstoy employs in *Resurrection* are more similar to sculpture and drawing than to painting, as in “Lucerne.” In a letter to Chertkov on May 5, 1899 Tolstoy, discussing *Resurrection*, compares himself to Trubetskoi “the fact is that, like the clever portraitist and sculptor (Trubetskoi), is occupied only with what is necessary to convey facial expression—eyes, are thus the main thing for me—the spiritual life, which is expressed in scenes. I cannot rework these scenes.”⁷⁵ Again, reality for the late Tolstoy revolves around an inner truth, the spiritual and moral reality of a character instead of the truthful depiction of a physical exterior. Throughout March and the summer months of 1899 Trubetskoi came to Yasnaya Polyana to sculpt two busts of Tolstoy. The author’s continued interaction with the sculptor at this time may have inspired the use of sculptural techniques in later works like *Resurrection*.

The novel features several instances of a device typical for Tolstoy, in which a character’s body part or mannerism morphs into a physical epithet. In his descriptions of Maslova, Tolstoy repeatedly mentions her curly black hair (вьющиеся черные волосы) and full bosom (полная грудь). Like Trubetskoi, Tolstoy calls particular attention to eyes. In the first description of Maslova he writes “the strongest feature of her face was her eyes, jet black against the dull pallor of her skin, fluttering despite some puffiness, and brimming with life; one of them had a slight cast in it.”⁷⁶ Tolstoy references the slight cast in one eye with almost every mention

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Дело в том, что, как умный портретист, скульптор (Трубецк[ой]), занят только тем, чтобы передать выражение лица — глаз, так для меня главное — душевная жизнь, выражающаяся в сценах. И эти сцены не мог не перерабатывать. Tolstoi, PSS 88:156.

⁷⁶ В лице этом поражали, особенно на матовой бледности лица, очень черные, блестящие, несколько подпухшие, но очень оживленные глаза, из которых один косил немного. Ibid., 7 [32:5].

of Maslova throughout the novel. Tolstoy also repeatedly describes the eyes of Maria Pavlovna, a revolutionary and inmate in the same prison as Maslova.

These limited descriptions are often achromatic, featuring the juxtaposition of black and white images; take for example the striking black of Maslova's hair against her skin and white kerchief. The play between negative and positive space also has a sculptural quality, while the precision and starkness of the limited descriptions recall ink drawings. Jill Durey links Tolstoy's use of contrasting images with his study of sculpture. Discussing the juxtaposition of Anna Karenina's and Countess Vronskia's facial expressions in *Anna Karenina*, Durey writes "the contrast ... suggests to us that Tolstoy, in his study of sculpture, was well aware of the power of contrapposto."⁷⁷ In 1866, from the end of January to early March, Tolstoy studied sculpture at the School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture under the artist N. A. Ramazanov. In a letter to A. Fet in May 1866 Tolstoy wrote "I started studying sculpture. I won't be an artist but the activity has already proven quite pleasant and instructive."⁷⁸

The use of stark contrasts, verbal contrapposto, is an important stylistic vehicle of Tolstoy's moral message in his later works. The opening paragraph of the novel is rife with such contrasts. It begins with a description of the city and features the juxtaposition of natural and urban environments as well as adults and children. Tolstoy presents a multi-sensory clash between man and nature, and describes people "clogging the land with stones to make sure nothing could grow...their elimination of every last grass shoot...the fumes from coal and

⁷⁷ Jill Felicity Durey, "Intermodality in the Novels of George Eliot, Lev Tolstoy and Gustave Flaubert," *Revue de literature compare* 66.2 (April, 1992): 182. Contrapposto (Italian meaning set against) is a term used to describe poses in which one part of a figure turns away from another part. Though originally used to discuss sculpture, the term is now also applied to painting. See Michael Clark, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 66–67.

⁷⁸ Начал учиться скульптуре. Художником я не буду, но занятие это уже дало мне много приятного и поучительного. Tolstoi, PSS 61:139.

oil...[and] the lopping of trees and the driving out of animals and birds.”⁷⁹ He portrays the city as a deadening force, which exists in continuous conflict with nature’s vivacity. In a related contrast Tolstoy compares adult members of society, whom he connects with the city, to children, whom he includes in his list of plants and animals. “Joy was everywhere, in plants and birds, insects and children.”⁸⁰ Conversely, “the adults, the grown-ups...saw nothing sacred or significant in this spring morning...for them the sacred and the significant meant anything they could devise to gain power over others.”⁸¹

Tolstoy uses visual and olfactory imagery to further the contrast between city and nature. He describes the “dark, stinking corridor” of the prison and the “blast of air that stank worse than the corridor” emitted when the warder opens the outer door of the prison. A description of the “fresh and invigorating” air in the yard immediately follows. Tolstoy repeats the contrast a second time and explains how “in the corridor the air was heavy with typhus and saturated with the stench of sewage, tar and putrefaction, and it immediately reduced all newcomers to a state of depression and despondency.”⁸² Here again Tolstoy connects internal, man-made spaces with death and stagnation. Consistent with “Lucerne,” Tolstoy links open, natural spaces with life and movement.

This dichotomy is nothing new for Tolstoy. The struggle between the natural and “civilized” worlds appear in his earlier works, such as “Lucerne.” However, it is this short, precise, and sparing manner of exposition, particularly the inclusion of black and white binaries,

⁷⁹ Забивали камнями землю, чтобы ничего не росло на ней... счищали всякую пробивающуюся травку... дымили каменным углем и нефтью... обрезывали деревья и ни выгоняли всех животных и птиц. Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, 5. [Tolstoi, *PSS* 32:3].

⁸⁰ Ibid. Веселы были и растения, и птицы, и насекомые, и дети.

⁸¹ Ibid. Большие, взрослые люди...считали, что священно и важно не это весеннее утро... а священно и важно то, что они сами выдумали, чтобы властвовать друг над другом.

⁸² В коридоре был удручающий тифозный воздух, пропитанный запахом испражнений, дегтя и гнили, который тотчас же приводил в уныние и грусть всякого вновь приходившего человека. Ibid., 6 [32:4].

that differs from his previous treatments of the same theme. Tolstoy trades the color palette seen in the landscape descriptions in “Lucerne” for a more achromatic and divisionist handling of hues. Since the color palette is so limited in *Resurrection* it is important to note the instances in which Tolstoy does mention a specific color. White and black are by far the most prominent colors in the novel and contribute to the overall visual tone of the work. The words for white (белый) and black (черный) appear over 100 times each in the novel, not including similar words such as pale, light, or dark. This greatly exceeds the mention of any other color in the novel.⁸³ Scholars such as Christian and David Danaher have commented on, what Christian calls the “typically Tolstoyan” contrast of “light and darkness,” however neither mention the marked increase in this device in later works compared with earlier ones.⁸⁴ Danaher argues that, in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, dark imagery often marks “falsity and untruth,” while light imagery reflects “both true and false light in the story.”⁸⁵

As in *Ivan Ilych*, black and white pairings in *Resurrection* often coincide with and underscore the juxtaposition of moral and immoral forces. For example, Nekhliudov looks out the window at “a tall, leafless poplar tree [which] cast sharp shadows of its forking, spreading branches on to the neatly kept sandy ground... on his left a shed-roof shone white in the bright morning. Straight ahead the black shadow of the wall could be dimly seen through the interwoven branches of the trees.”⁸⁶ The dark shadow cutting across the white façade as well as the image of forked branches echoes the two lives that pull at Nekhliudov. The animal and the

⁸³ Red (красный) appears 42 times, not including the verbs to blush or to redden, gray (серый) 29, yellow (желтый) 25, green (зеленый) 24, light-blue (голубой) 18, dark-blue (синий) 17, pink (розовый) 9, purple (лиловый) 4, brown (коричневый) 3 times, and orange (оранжевый) appears only once.

⁸⁴ Christian, *Critical Introduction*, 225, 227.

⁸⁵ David Danaher, “Tolstoy’s Use of Light and Dark Imagery in *The Death of Ivan Il’ič*,” *SEEJ* 39.2 (1995), 227.

⁸⁶ Тень сучьев оголенного высокого тополя, всеми своими развилинами отчетливо лежащая на песке... Налево была крыша сарая, казавшаяся белой под ярким светом луны. Впереди переплетались сучья деревьев, из-за которых виднелась черная тень забора. Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, 119–120 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 32:104].

spiritual selves battle within him. Over several pages Tolstoy describes this internal struggle, however the internal division is most striking in the image of the forked tree trunk, a single living entity which is pulled in two separate directions. The black shadow against the white building emphasizes this division. However, emphasizing moral contrast is not the only function of such imagery. I argue that Tolstoy also includes so many couplings of black and white, or light and dark, to create a stark and serious visual tone to the work.

Contrasts appear again in Tolstoy's depictions of space. Unlike in earlier works, the action of *Resurrection* takes place almost exclusively indoors. Tolstoy trades his panoramic views of battlefields and country estates for the confines of courthouses, prison cells, and other buildings. Even the scenes that take place out of doors feature a sense of confinement as they are mostly descriptions of the prisoners marching in strict lines. This confined representation of space changes the visual aesthetic. Unlike in many paintings, where the artist can depict open space in the distance, or allude to space outside the picture plane, sculpture by nature deals with enclosed forms.

In a letter to Tolstoy on July 20, 1899 Vladimir Vasil'evich Stasov compares descriptions in *Resurrection* with sculpture and drawing. He writes, "you draw and sculpt such things, which tyrannize and outrage everyone but which no one dares or is capable of putting before our eyes. What innovation and force, such amazing and convex sculpture! Such characters, like living people!"⁸⁷ Having struggled all his life with the fear of death and his search for meaning, Tolstoy arrives at philosophical clarity and comes the closest he can to accepting the inevitability of death. Just as he chisels out a singular moral message from the

⁸⁷ Тут вы рисуете и лепите такие вещи, которые всех тиранят, всех возмущают, но которых никто не смеет, да и не умеет поставить перед всеми глазами. И какая новизна, и какая сила, и какая скульптура выпуклая и поразительная! И какие характеры и какие живые люди. Tolstoi, *PSS*, 72:149.

multiplicity of potential paths before his characters, so too does Tolstoy pare down the expansive spaces of the world around them.

Tolstoy's descriptions of the natural landscape in works like "Lucerne" are often instances of associative ekphrasis. Conversely, *Resurrection* is almost devoid of extended descriptions, particularly of outdoor environments. The novel does however, feature ekphrastic passages, albeit short ones. Nekhliudov encounters several paintings, most often official portraits. Tolstoy frequently includes a second work of art as a sort of moralizing pendant piece to these portraits, combining the use of depictive ekphrasis with his technique of visual contrast to draw the reader-viewer's attention to an important ideological message in the novel.

For example, in the courtroom on the first day of Maslova's trial, the narrator points out that behind an elegant table and tall-backed armchairs "hung a striking, gold-framed, full-length portrait of a general in uniform and sash, standing with one foot thrust forward and holding his sabre. In the right-hand corner hung an icon-case with an image of Christ crowned with thorns."⁸⁸ The two paintings concisely portray the self-importance, decadence, and pomp character of high society, and the humility, suffering, and faith it lacks. G. A. Akhmetova notes that an icon of Christ appears in every episode connected with either the court or prison systems. She explains that the juxtaposition of the general's portrait with the Christ icon in this scene represents the clash between the earthly and divine realms of existence, and that the icon "communicates the suffering of Christ through a visual language" (визуальным языком говорит).⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Висел в золотой раме яркий портрет во весь рост генерала в мундире и ленте, отставившего ногу и держащегося за саблю. В правом углу висел киот с образом Христа в терновом венке. Ibid., 73 [32:25].

⁸⁹ G. A. Akhmetova, "Ikona i kartina v romane 'Voskreseniie' i pozdnikh povestiakh L. N. Tolstogo," *Filologiya i iskusstvovedeniie* 18.1 (2013), 467.

Tolstoy smoothly and quickly guides his reader's eye from the furniture, to the portrait, the icon, then the court secretary's desk and other items in the room. Compared to the detailed illustrations of landscapes in "Lucerne," the description of these two works of art is very brief. Tolstoy omits descriptions of the facial expressions of the subjects, the contents of the background, and even color. He uses the works of art to concisely relate his message without interrupting the narrative flow of the novel. In other instances of depictive ekphrasis, Tolstoy does not even describe the paintings, he only mentions them. This is exemplary of the marriage of visual and verbal art in his later work for clear didactic purposes.

In one such scene Tolstoy contrasts an icon of Christ with a portrait of the Tsar. The Senate Chamber "contained all the things you would expect in a place where judgement is dispensed: the mirror of justice, an icon and a portrait of the emperor."⁹⁰ "Another corner was hung with a large icon of Jesus Christ, an essential feature of all places where people come to be tortured, and a mockery of his teaching."⁹¹ Tolstoy punctuates his words with the two contrasting images. The focus is less on the works of art and more on the statement that follows their description. In a similar instance, Tolstoy shows how "Nekhlyudov was startled to see a huge painting of the crucifixion in an alcove... In his imagination he couldn't help associating the image of Christ with setting people free rather than locking them up."⁹² Again, Tolstoy provides no details about the painting except for its size and subject. The emphasis is on the message that it precedes.

⁹⁰ Были всегдашние атрибуты мест отправления правосудия: зеркало, икона, портрет государя. Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, 312 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 32:272].

⁹¹ В другом углу висел, — всегдашняя принадлежность всех мест мучительства, как бы в насмешку над его учением, — большой образ Христа. Ibid., 206–207 [32: 181].

⁹² Нехлюдов увидел в нише большое изображение распятия... невольно соединяя в своем представлении изображение Христа с освобожденными, а не с заключенными. Ibid., 164 [32: 142].

Just like the stiff, official portraits and the Christ icons that hang in there, the stuffy courtroom, putrid-smelling prison, and crowded cells themselves are used to relate Tolstoy's message. He contrasts the spaces that make up Nekhliudov's and Maslova's present with the fresh, open, light space of the country estate of their past. Their first kiss takes place in a lilac bush during a game of tag played in the nearby meadow. This scene includes several mentions of movement, light, the fragrance of the flowers, and open spaces. The contrast between the imprisoned Maslova and the young Katyusha running "on her lively and nimble young legs" is quite striking.⁹³ By understanding who she was then, a young, innocent, lively girl, the reader more fully comprehends Nekhliudov's shock at meeting the hardened, cold, and sexualized Maslova.

Tolstoy moves back in time not only in terms of his characters' lives, but also in regard to his own aesthetic. The reader briefly reencounters visual elements of the early Tolstoy. Before beginning to recall scenes from the past, Nekhliudov exited the courtroom, "walked out into the jurymen's room and sat down by a window." The reader can picture Nekhliudov gazing out the window as he begins to remember "Yes it was Katyusha..."⁹⁴ Just as he frames the landscape painting in "Lucerne" by having Nekhliudov view it through his hotel room window, Tolstoy again frames his more painterly scene with a window. It is also in this flashback that almost the only flashes of color appear in the novel in the "red silk scarves and short velvet jackets, bright-red blouses, gaily coloured skirts, blue, green and red" of the peasant women at church.⁹⁵ It is in this return to his earlier aesthetic that Tolstoy sets Nekhliudov's seduction of Maslova, linking his earlier "painterly" style with his youthful sinful behavior.

⁹³ Ibid., 52 [32:45].

⁹⁴ Ibid., 49–50 [32:43].

⁹⁵ Бабы в красных шелковых платках, плисовых поддевах, с яркочерными рукавами и синими, зелеными, красными, пестрыми юбками. Ibid., 63 [32:54].

Though Tolstoy interrupts the linear flow of the narrative with this return to the past, the role of the flashback is not to detain the reader in space like the narrative-disrupting descriptions in “Lucerne.” The focus of “Lucerne” is description over “storyline” (фабула). The foundation of *Resurrection* lies on the temporal-casual sequence of events that make up the plot. Tolstoy shows how Nekhliudov’s seduction of Maslova sparks a series of events that leads to her downfall, and how his moral epiphany starts another sequence of events in motion that leads to both character’s spiritual and moral rebirth. Tolstoy emphasizes the importance of time by contrasting the past with the present. By plotting out major life-altering events for each character, Tolstoy allows the reader to imagine the life trajectories of both Maslova and Nekhliudov from their first kiss, a defining moment in the past, up to the present moment in the courtroom.

The importance of plot is one of the major aspects of temporal literature that appear in *Resurrection*. As Christian writes in his comparison of *Resurrection* with earlier works like *Anna Karenina*, “Tolstoy, while exploiting transition and antithesis, prefers to work with a single plot line and to impart unity to the novel by the central theme of guilt and expiation.”⁹⁶ This theme of guilt and penance arises from Tolstoy’s desire to tell a specific story to his audience, one rooted in his own guilt and shame. The basic plot of the novel came to Tolstoy in a conversation with renowned jurist Anatoly Koni. The “Koni story,” as Andrew Kauffman argues, particularly struck Tolstoy because he had committed a similar offense in his youth.⁹⁷ Tolstoy refers to an event in the “foolish life” (дурная жизнь) of his youth, one of two which “especially torment[ed]” (мучить) him until his death. He describes his actions as “a crime, which I committed with the chambermaid Gasha, who was living in my aunt’s house. She was innocent, I

⁹⁶ Christian, *Critical Introduction*, 222.

⁹⁷ Andrew D. Kauffman, *Understanding Tolstoy* (Columbus: The University of Ohio Press, 2011), 217.

seduced her, abandoned her, and she perished.”⁹⁸ The way he describes his affair with Gasha consists of a series of simple, clearly defined actions and their consequences. One action leads to another and so on in a traditional cause and effect narrative style. This type of narration also characterizes the fictionalized version of the story in the novel.

Nekhludov, early in the novel, mentions that he has abandoned his pursuit of landscape painting. He explains that, had he continued painting he “would be working on that picture, which will never get finished now because it wouldn’t be right for me to carry on with such stupid things. I can’t do anything like that anymore.”⁹⁹ In this moment Tolstoy speaks directly through his character about his own artistic experience. Looking back and condemning his earlier writing, Tolstoy decides that he cannot continue in the same fashion. His earlier work, which shares many stylistic and compositional elements with landscape painting, must be abandoned as it no longer fits with his new and more prohibitive world view. Tolstoy and Nekhludov both turn away from their unfinished landscape paintings, returning to them only through memory.

Forty-two years span the publication of “Lucerne” and *Resurrection*. In this time Tolstoy develops an aesthetic that critics link so closely with the concept of realism that Isaac Babel’ would remark, “if the world could write by itself, it would write like Tolstoy.” The drastic differences in Tolstoy’s early and late aesthetics suggest two worlds: a color-saturated and dynamic reality defined by its countless details, characters, and potential roads to moral salvation, and a simplified and austere reality of black-and-white divisions between right and wrong. My aim is to show that the shift from the former “painterly” to the later “draughtsmanly”

⁹⁸ Преступление, которое я совершил с горничной Гашей, жившей в доме моей тетки. Она была невинна, я ее соблазнил, ее прогнали, и она погибла. Tolstoi, PSS, 33:334.

⁹⁹ Или буду продолжать картину, которая, очевидно, никогда не будет кончена, потому что мне и не следует заниматься этими пустяками и не могу ничего этого делать теперь. Ibid., 137 [32:119].

aesthetics occurs gradually over the years that separate “Lucerne” and *Resurrection*, and that each is equally deserving of artistic merit and equally representative of Tolstoy’s understanding of reality at the time it was created.

In “Lucerne,” Tolstoy forces his reader to take in the spaces that surround the narrator Nekhliudov. Using the rule of thirds, Tolstoy divides the landscapes he describes into three sections, drawing the reader-viewer into the scene with a sense of depth that comes from his move from a solid green and brown foreground to an airy azure and violet background. He pairs these immersive verbal paintings, associative ekphrastic passages, with Nekhliudov’s inner musings on nature, civilization, and morality. He stops the reader in space, suspending the forward movement in time, and expounds upon the thoughts and feelings of his character, inspired in part by the images in front of him.

Tolstoy returns to Nekhliudov in *Resurrection*, still focusing on his internal ruminations. However, the changes that take place in the protagonist are the product of actions, not images. The narrative moves forward almost entirely unencumbered in this more temporal work of literature. Tolstoy does not linger on descriptions of his characters or their surroundings. His focus is the move from plot event to plot event that lead to the characters’ moral epiphanies. He underscores the already simplified and clear differences between what he depicts as right and wrong through the use of visual contrasts, often black and white imagery. Some of the contrasts contain ekphrasis. However, the ekphrastic passages, now depictive instead of associative, are short and to the point. Tolstoy mentions works of art to highlight the novel’s moral message.

The chapters that follow trace elements of each aesthetic throughout Tolstoy’s career, and show how the dialectic between the two is an ongoing process for the author rather than the result of his religious crisis and conversion in the 1880s. The discussion of *War and Peace*

shows how Tolstoy resists the temporal conventions traditional to the novel genre, expands upon the technique of verbal paintings, and begins to play with other types of ekphrasis including the most literal, depictive ekphrasis. In *Anna Karenina*, we see a more noticeable turning point for Tolstoy, as he moves away from the plotlessness of *War and Peace* and toward more linear narratives. I show how this work features a hybrid aesthetic in which Tolstoy does not champion the visual over the verbal, but rather uses techniques of the visual arts to augment his prose. Finally, in a discussion of Tolstoy's two major post-conversion works, I examine his creation of a liminal artistic space, a sort of blank canvas in *Confession*, upon which he makes the first marks in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. I show how although these later works come after his conversion, they still contain aspects of his older aesthetic and are more ambiguous in meaning than *Resurrection*.

CHAPTER TWO

War and Peace: Tolstoy's Gallery in Prose

Despite its overwhelming length, *War and Peace* (*Война и мир*) (1867–1869) is, in many ways, exemplary of Tolstoy's anxiety with the written word. As early as 1852 he explains how he believes, “words are quite inadequate to convey the imaginary, but it is even more difficult to express reality. The true communication of reality is the stumbling block of language.”¹⁰⁰ This distrust of language, the belief that all narratives are inherently false, causes him to look to other media. This chapter investigates aspects of Tolstoy's visual aesthetic in *War and Peace* and notes adjustments to the types of spatial devices identified in “Lucerne” that link his work with the visual arts, as well as the first appearance of depictive ekphrasis in Tolstoy's *oeuvre*. It also examines Tolstoy's complex depictions of time as they relate to the temporal arts as well as his philosophy of history.

Given his linguistic anxieties and affinity for the visual, it makes sense that in his “A Few Words Apropos of the Book *War and Peace*” Tolstoy repeatedly compares himself to a painter and his writing to works of visual art. He specifically discusses the opposition between an artist (художник), who “derives for himself an image of the event that took place,” and an historian (историк), who draws a “conclusion about the activity of such-and-such an army [which] turns out to be the opposite of the artist's conclusion.”¹⁰¹ By linking himself with the artist instead of the historian, Tolstoy demonstrates his affinity for detailed description, and his focus on impressions and images over sequences of events.

¹⁰⁰ Слово далеко не может передать воображаемого, но выразить действительность еще труднее. Верная передача действительности есть камень преткновения слова. Translation quoted in Rimvydas Šilbajoris, *Tolstoy's Aesthetics*, 17. Original Russian from L. N. Tolstoi, *PSS*, 3:216.

¹⁰¹ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volkhonsky, (New York: Vintage Classics, 2008): 1219 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 7:357].

In this much longer work, Tolstoy is able to revisit and reevaluate the devices used in “Lucerne” and experiment with other, more complex elements of spatial art. He relies on techniques traditional to painting and drawing to augment his verbal descriptions of the world and the way in which his protagonists experience it. *War and Peace* sees further borrowing from the visual arts including not only techniques used in landscape painting, but also portraiture and sculpture. The novel also features a number of ekphrastic passages, ranging from the most literal, depictive ekphrasis (descriptions of works of art), to associative ekphrasis (painting with words), which is the most diffuse.

Lessing designates poetry (the verbal arts) as temporal, and painting (the visual arts) as inherently spatial. Temporal arts are based on the forward progression of time, a sequence of events. Spatial art, specifically plastic arts like painting, drawing, and sculpture, are confined to a single moment in time, leaving them ill-equipped for narration. Thus, Tolstoy’s preference for characteristics of spatial arts links his prose more with the structure of visual arts. Tolstoy employs several types of what Frank calls “spatial forms” in *War and Peace*. Such devices include the progression and retardation of plot, repetition, extended descriptions, and varying types of ekphrasis. I argue that this emphasis on the visual and implementation of spatial art techniques suggest Tolstoy’s yearning for a way to represent reality in a manner that goes beyond what the arbitrary signs that comprise verbal art could convey—Tolstoy’s attempt to create natural signs with words.

The novel, which as Tolstoy himself notes, has no beginning, middle, or end in the traditional sense. Not only are scenes self-contained like paintings, many outside the main plot points can also be experienced in almost any order or individually. The reader can wander the halls of Tolstoy’s gallery taking in certain images, passing others by in his spatial-mesh plot

design, which brings with it a view of causality more difficult to discern than simple cause and effect. The reader moves not only linearly in time, but laterally as well, as Tolstoy presents views of events occurring simultaneously in different places. This is also reflected in Tolstoy's discussion of history as a network of small, simultaneous incidents rather than a string of monumental acts made by the great men of history. He further interrupts the forward progression of time with his characteristic use of repetition, both in sentence structure and imagery. His extended descriptions of nature, which feature techniques typical of landscape painting like those in "Lucerne," arrest the reader in time, causing the focus to shift from the passage of time to the experience of his representation of space.

I. Plotting Tolstoy's Gallery of Moments: Cyclical and Linear Time

Tolstoy's insistence that *War and Peace* "is not a novel, still less and epic poem, still less a historical chronicle"¹⁰² relates in a large sense to the work's "plotlessness." James M. Curtis argues that much of the criticism of *War and Peace* arose because scholars attempted to find forms typical of the novel, that is specifically temporal forms, and were inevitably disappointed in their pursuit. It is however, impossible to argue that *War and Peace* is completely devoid of plot. Though Tolstoy interrupts, slows, and reorders the sequence of events, time inevitably moves forward. The first page designates that the action takes place in a specific moment in time, July 1805. Over eleven hundred pages later, the reader arrives in 1819. Tolstoy notes at the start of the first epilogue that "seven years had passed since 1812."¹⁰³ Viktor Shklovsky explains that "Tolstoy always had an exact sense of period and highlighted the date of a work with references

¹⁰² Ibid., 1217 [16:7].

¹⁰³ Ibid., [12:235].

to chronologically accurate details.”¹⁰⁴ Though the reader eventually moves chronologically, many of Tolstoy’s visual metaphors and imagery suggest a cyclical view of time which inhibits plot progression and detains the reader in space, more like “Lucerne.” The dialectic between verbal and visual art is reflected as a struggle between temporal and spatial forms, which exists in part in the tension and vacillation between linear and cyclical time.

Before looking at specific images and metaphors in the novel, I want to turn to Tolstoy’s attitudes toward narration at the time he began writing *War and Peace* as they speak to his understanding of time and how to depict it in his work. Describing a history lesson conducted at his Yasnaya Polyana school on the period discussed in *War and Peace* Tolstoy notes, “I told in almost a fairy-tale manner, for the most part, I was historically inaccurate and grouped the events around a single character.”¹⁰⁵ This statement is significant in what it shows about Tolstoy’s narrative technique and conception of time at this moment in his career. Though the Yasnaya Polyana school was a pedagogical pursuit, one can see the pairing of narrative techniques used in fiction with historical fact in Tolstoy’s mind. During his work on *War and Peace*, Tolstoy was interested in folklore and the Russian *bylinas*.¹⁰⁶ Time in folktales and the *bylinas* is what Mircea Eliade calls “anhistorical.” Eliade explains that “the man of archaic cultures tolerates ‘history’ with difficulty and attempts periodically to abolish it.”¹⁰⁷ Historical, or linear time, disappears from the collective memory, from which folktales and *bylinas* arise. Individuals morph into archetypes and events become categories.

¹⁰⁴ Viktor Shklovsky, *Lev Tolstoy*, translated by Olga Shartse, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978): 358.

¹⁰⁵ English translation from Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoy in the Sixties*, 143.

¹⁰⁶ Bylina (БЫЛИНА) is an oral epic poem traditional to the Eastern Slavs that is loosely based on historical events.

¹⁰⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return Or, Cosmos and History*, translated by Willard R. Trask, (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1971): 36.

Eliade generally refers to “civilized man” as historical and “primitive man” as anhistorical. He explains that for the latter, “time is recorded only biologically without being allowed to become ‘history’—that is, without its corrosive action being able to exert itself upon consciousness by revealing the irreversibility of events.”¹⁰⁸ It is through peasant characters, “primitive” men, that truth is communicated in Tolstoy’s work. Part of this truth, how one should live, is the acceptance of an organic and thus cyclical model of time. *War and Peace*, Tolstoy’s historical chronicle, in fact advocates for a “anhistorical” understanding of time. It disavows the conception of the great men of history, the irreversibility of events, and a strictly linear experience of time. Curtis, who echoes Eikhenbaum, argues that there “is no clear distinction between history and myth in *War and Peace*.”¹⁰⁹ The mixture of truth and fiction recalls the *bylinas* that so interested Tolstoy at this time and speaks to a more subjective realism that lies in the artist’s conscious construction of reality in the novel and not the mimetic recreation and retelling of fact to the reader.

Perhaps the most prominent cyclical symbol is the portrait Tolstoy paints of one such primitive man: the peasant Platon Karataev. In his description, Tolstoy repeats the adjective round (круглый). Karataev is “the embodiment of everything Russian, kindly and round.”¹¹⁰ He has “rounded, deft movements that followed one another without pause.” Tolstoy notes that “Pierre felt something pleasant, soothing, and rounded in these deft movements.” Karataev, whose “round face looked still more round and comely” even smiles “roundly” (кругло).¹¹¹ Pierre’s impression of Karataev as

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 74–75.

¹⁰⁹ James M. Curtis, “Notes on Spatial Form in Tolstoy,” *Sewanee Review* 78.3 (Summer 1970): 522.

¹¹⁰ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 972. олицетворением всего русского доброго и круглого [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 12:48].

¹¹¹ Ibid., 969, 1011 [12:45, 95]. круглыми, спорыми, без замедления следовавшими одно за другим, движениями. Пьеру чувствовалось что-то приятное, успокоительное и круглое в этих спорых движениях... круглое лицо его казалось еще круглее и милее.

something round was fully confirmed: the whole figure of Platon...was round, his head was perfectly round, his back, chest, shoulders, even his arms, which he held as if always about to embrace something, were round; his pleasant smile and his large, brown, tender eyes were round...his teeth...kept popping out in two semicircles...his face, despite its small, round wrinkles, had an expression of innocence and youth.

первое впечатление чего-то круглого подтвердилось вполне: вся фигура Платона... была круглая, голова была совершенно круглая, спина, грудь, плечи, даже руки, которые он носил как бы всегда собираясь обнять что-то, были круглые; приятная улыбка и большие карие, нежные глаза были круглые... зубы его...все выказывались своими двумя полукругами...Лицо его, несмотря на мелкие круглые морщинки, имело выражение невинности и юности.¹¹²

The portrait of Platon Karataev is a point in the novel where Tolstoy's philosophical argument and visual aesthetic seamlessly merge. Tolstoy celebrates the peasant's view of life as a cycle, in which even the terrifying inevitability of death is simply another stage in the natural order of existence. Just before presenting the reader with the above portrait of Karataev, Tolstoy notes how, listening to Karataev's "regular snoring" Pierre feels that "the previously destroyed world was now arising in his soul with a new beauty."¹¹³

Pierre encounters another of Tolstoy's major symbols of cyclical time in a dream. An old geography teacher shows Pierre a globe which "was a living, wavering ball of no dimensions. The entire surface of the ball consisted of drops tightly packed together. And these drops all moved and shifted, and now merged from several into one, now divided from one into many."¹¹⁴ Eliade, in his definition of the eternal return, explains that for primitive cultures "the death of the individual and the death of humanity are alike necessary for their regeneration. Any form ...necessarily loses vigor and becomes worn; to recover vigor, it must be reabsorbed into the formless if only for an instant; it must be restored to the primordial unity from which it issued."¹¹⁵ This is precisely what Tolstoy describes through the imagery in Pierre's dream, and

¹¹² Ibid., 972 [12:48–49].

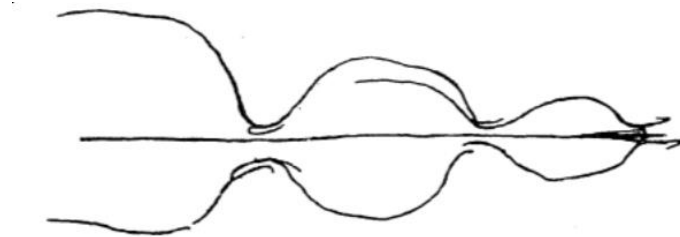
¹¹³ Ibid. прежде разрушенный мир теперь с новой красотой... двигался в его душе.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 1065–1066 [12:158].

¹¹⁵ Eliade, *Myth*, 88.

what he would term “double-ended immortality” in a diary entry on January 24, 1894. The “double-ended immortality,” or cycles of deaths and rebirths is a prominent theme throughout Tolstoy’s work. George Clay discusses this topic at length in his book *Tolstoy’s Phoenix*.¹¹⁶

Tolstoy drew a rough diagram of this “double-ended immortality” (**Figure 2**) in his diary. The central line in the diagram represents God and the waved lines on either side represent human existence. Each life is closest to God before birth and after death.¹¹⁷ As Hugh McLean explains, “our life after death (and also, presumably, before birth) will lack personality, individuality. We were and will be fused with the deity in a state to which the earthly concepts of space and time are inapplicable.”¹¹⁸ Though he would draw the diagram toward the end of his life, Tolstoy engages with a similar image much earlier: the globe in Pierre’s dream. The dimensionless globe represents God, the “primordial unity” to use Eliade’s term. Individual drops represent human lives, which join with and emerge from the globe with each death and birth.



¹¹⁶ Clay discusses cyclical time in *War and Peace* using the image of a phoenix. He writes that Tolstoy pairs the historical rise and fall of the Russian people with the “biological phoenix cycle” of his characters. Clay identifies a “death-and-resurrection design within which Tolstoy fits his characters’ interactions.... [through which] he renders endless variations of the same overall phoenix pattern as he puts each of his five protagonists through a series of mock deaths and resurrections, intricately interwoven with the war and with the process of getting older” (212). These deaths and rebirths can be either physical or spiritual/moral. See George Clay, *Tolstoy’s Phoenix: From Method to Meaning in War and Peace*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press: 1998).

¹¹⁷ Tolstoi, PSS, 52:110. Прямая линия — это Бог. Узкие места — это приближение к смерти и рождение. В этих местах ближе Бог. Он ничем не скрыт. А в середине жизни он заглушен сложностью жизни.

¹¹⁸ Hugh McLean, “Rousseau’s God and Tolstoy’s,” *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 9 (1997): 29.

Figure 2: Drawing from Tolstoy's diary. January 24, 1894.

While working on his second draft of the introductory remarks to *War and Peace* in 1856, Tolstoy writes, “no matter how much I tried at first to think up a novelistic plot and dénouement, I became convinced that it was not within my powers, and I decided, in describing these characters, to give way to my own habits and strengths. I tried only to give each part of my work its own independent interest (which was contained not in the development of events, but in the development).”¹¹⁹ Tolstoy's reluctance, what he deems an inability, to create a conventional novelistic plot springs from his loyalty to communicating the truth to his reader, the accurate portrayal of reality. He describes his scenes as self-contained and focused not on plot events, but on the development, the reality of the novel by means of description. He goes on to explain that in general Russians are unable to write novels in the European sense, and that because Russian artistic literature does not fit within the frames of the Western genre, writers like himself are searching for a new frame. For Tolstoy at this time, the new frame becomes the self-contained scenes and spatial forms that characterize his “painterly” aesthetic.

This unease with and distrust of temporal progression, that is, traditional linear and historical time, in *War and Peace* ties into Tolstoy's general discomfort with the written word since writing is inherently narrative. He repeatedly attempts to bypass language, an arbitrary sign system, to connect more closely with reality through a natural sign system, that is, through the visual rather than the verbal. The way in which he presents action i.e. plot events, upends traditional novelistic conventions.

¹¹⁹ Draft manuscript № 39. Сколько я ни пытался сначала придумать романическую завязку и развязку, я убедился, что это не в моих средствах, и решился в описании этих лиц отдаться своим привычкам и силам... Я старался только, чтобы каждая часть сочинения имела независимый интерес. *Зачеркнуто:* заключающийся не в развитии событий, а в развитии. The English translation is quoted in Sankovitch, *Repetition*, 22. Sankovitch notes that Tolstoy later crossed out the part in parentheses. Tolstoi, *PSS*, 13:55.

Morson argues that *War and Peace* “challenges the very base upon which the tradition of the European novel is built... [and] violates the most fundamental norms of narrative art in general and of the novel in particular.”¹²⁰ Tolstoy’s manipulation of time inverts the traditions of the temporal arts found in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Aristotle advocates for the representation of a series of events over a period of time in the verbal arts because, for him, “a single period cannot be a proper subject for a plot because events that happen at the same time do not ‘tend to any one result.’”¹²¹ Though time does move linearly in the work, Tolstoy depicts actions in *War and Peace* in the same span of time and from a multitude of perspectives. Tolstoy, using the metaphor of a stencil, explains the manner through which more truthful narrative accounts take shape. He explains that, “some figure or other gets painted, not depending on the direction or manner in which the paint is applied, but because the figure cut out of the stencil is smeared in all directions with paint.”¹²² Multiple perspectives and descriptions of events, like the colors Tolstoy describes, are layered one on top of the other in the space of a single temporal period, inverting conventional temporality to create a vertical depiction of time. To return to Lessing, a painting only depicts one moment at a time, it cannot by its nature communicate temporal progression to the viewer. Unlike in traditional narratives, Tolstoy’s representation of reality is not formed in a neat sequence that can be read from left to right. By limiting the scope of his work to a specific span of time, one historical moment, Tolstoy designates the borders of the picture plane, and portrays what he can in the confines of his canvas.

¹²⁰ Morson, *Hidden in Plain View*, 37.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹²² как в трафарете рисуется такая или другая фигура не потому, в какую сторону и как мазано по нем красками, а потому, что по фигуре, вырезанной в трафарете во все стороны было мазано краской. Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 1196 [Tolstoi, PSS, 12:317].

Tolstoy not only stretches and retards time in the novel, but also fragments it. Morson refers to *War and Peace* as a “narrative of interruption,”¹²³ in which Tolstoy creates a “polyphony of incident...” Plot events retain “radical autonomy,” and various incidents are able “to achieve their own significance unforeseen by the author and unrestrained by a usual plot.”¹²⁴ Tolstoy was uncomfortable with narratives in general. In Tolstoy’s eyes, narratives, by their nature, are inherently false since they are always directed at an audience, which manipulates the manner of narration, and they inevitably omit the inconsequential, insignificant actions from which reality is forged. The fragmentation of time would have been more striking to contemporary readers of Tolstoy than to today’s audience since the novel was published in serialized form. The autonomy of events becomes more noticeable when published in distinct sections without the preceding or following parts.

II. The Landscape Gallery: Associative Ekphrasis

One of the most striking stylistic features of *War and Peace* is the overwhelming length, depth, and frequency of prolonged, multi-layered descriptions. These extensive descriptions are not limited to historical battles or major characters, but also include locations and characters that make brief or singular appearances in the novel. Since, as Morson notes, *War and Peace* is composed almost exclusively of “middle,” such singular, self-contained moments enjoy greater significance than they would in the context of a traditionally structured narrative, that is, one with a beginning, middle, and end. Of these descriptions, those of landscapes are prominent and comprise some of the most painterly and visually stunning sections of the novel. Tolstoy adorns self-contained moments throughout the novel with various types of verbal paintings. These

¹²³ Morson, *Hidden in Plain View*, 156.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

landscapes are instances of associative ekphrasis, which refers to structural, thematic, or theoretical conventions or ideas associated with the plastic arts.¹²⁵ He arrests his reader in time with extended descriptions and forces this reader-turned-viewer to become aware of space, stopping to regard this or that “painting” in Tolstoy’s gallery of moments. This section of the chapter takes us on a tour of some of the novel’s most stunning landscape “paintings.”

Tolstoy layers the perceptions of different characters atop those of the author-narrator to create what Yacobi calls “literature’s alleged yearning for imagelike simultaneity, roundness, permanence, eternal return—in short, deliverance from time—finds its quintessential expression in the ‘still movement’ or ‘stopped moment’ captured by ekphrasis.”¹²⁶ The descriptions of landscapes comprise one of many types of ekphrasis that appear in *War and Peace*. These passages are exemplary of what Robillard calls “associative ekphrastic texts,” which refer to ideas and/or structural, thematic, and theoretical conventions associated with the visual arts, and Krieger’s concept of “word paintings.”

The landscape descriptions examined below share both structural and thematic conventions with the landscape painting genre. The similarities in subject matter are clear, but upon closer analysis structural similarities such as color use, composition, vantage point, and divisions of the picture plane become apparent, in addition to a certain self-consciousness that identifies the medium as an intentional, and thus artificial form of representation. In adhering to landscape painting composition in his descriptions, Tolstoy asks his reader to question the truth of the reality he presents. Tolstoy calls attention to the artificial composition of his landscape by noting that “all this was etched with unnatural distinctness, with the finest lines, in the

¹²⁵ Robillard, “In Pursuit of Ekphrasis,” 62.

¹²⁶ Tamar Yacobi, “Pictorial Models and Narrative Ekphrasis,” *Poetics Today* 16.4 (1995): 615.

transparent air” on a surface of “bright immobile brilliance.” The use of the word “etched” (вырезывалось) calls to mind not the author writing words on the page, but rather the artist meticulously drawing lines and shapes on the page or canvas. A similar effect is achieved in noting the “freshly varnished” (точно покрытые лаком) quality of the objects in the sunlight. Jeffrey R. Smitten notes that in spatial literature, “through the destruction of illusion...the reader is forcibly reminded of the textuality of the book, that he is merely reading words on a page.”¹²⁷ Tolstoy does more than ask his reader to see the landscapes described. He forces his reader to recognize, not the textuality of *War and Peace*, but rather its visuality.

In a description of the Russian army's position near the Danube River, Tolstoy specifies the visual perspective from which the scene should be viewed. The reader-viewer must regard the scene “from the height where the Russian batteries stood.” In an instance of verbal *repoussoir*,¹²⁸ Tolstoy the author-painter physically places the reader in this position by designating the foreground not as what is seen nearby, but by specifically stating “at one’s feet one could see...” By placing the viewer in the extreme foreground instead of an object or figure in the text, he makes the visual experience of the description that follows more immersive. The reader-viewer becomes part of the image, truly arresting him or her in the space of the novel. Tolstoy repeats the phrase “one could see” (виделся/виднелись) several times throughout the passage, emphasizing the visual nature of the experience for the reader. Tolstoy divides the landscape into three sections of foreground, middle, and background, placing the town and

¹²⁷ Smitten, “Spatial Form,” 24.

¹²⁸ Is a term taken from the French verb *repousser*, meaning to push back. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* defines *repoussoir* as “an object, motif, or figure placed in the right or left foreground of a picture to act as a framing element which leads the spectator's eye back into the composition.” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* 2nd ed., s.v. “repoussoir.”

bridge at the viewer's feet, the bed of the Danube, pine forest and gorges in the middle plane, and in the background "far away on a hilltop" (далеко впереди на горе) the French patrol.

The vast prospect that opened out from the height where the Russian batteries stood, defending the bridge, was now suddenly covered by a muslin curtain of slanting rain, then suddenly widened out, and in the sunlight objects became visible and clear in the distance, as if freshly varnished. At one's feet one could see the little town with its white houses and red roofs, the cathedral, and the bridge, on both sides of which streamed crowding masses of Russian troops. At the bed of the Danube one could see boats and an island...one could see the left bank of the Danube, rocky and covered with pine forest, with a mysterious distance of green treetops and bluish gorges...and far away on a hilltop...one could see the mounted patrols of the enemy.

Пространная перспектива, раскрывавшаяся с возвышения, где стояли русские батареи, защищавшие мост, то вдруг затягивалась кисейным занавесом косого дождя, то вдруг расширялась, и при свете солнца далеко и ясно становились видны предметы, точно покрытые лаком. Виднелся городок под ногами с своими белыми домами и красными крышами, собором и мостом, по обеим сторонам которого, толпясь, лились массы русских войск. Виднелись на повороте Дуная суда, и остров... виднелся левый скалистый и покрытый сосновым лесом берег Дуная с таинственною далью зеленых вершин и голубеющими ущельями. Виднелись башни монастыря, выдававшегося из-за соснового, казавшегося нетронутым, дикого леса, и далеко впереди на горе... виднелись разъезды неприятеля.¹²⁹

Here Tolstoy also uses color to differentiate between the different sections. The foreground features whites and reds, and the middle plane consists of greens and blues. He retains the three-plane division of the landscape seen in "Lucerne" but does not adhere to the more traditional color divisions of landscape painting. The composition features both symmetrical and asymmetrical elements. The "crowding masses of Russian troops" flank the cathedral and bridge evenly, and the town spreads out before the viewer without emphasis on one particular side of the picture plane. However, Tolstoy shifts the balance of the "painting" to the left, placing, on the Danube's left bank, a pine forest composed of blues and greens above which the enemy becomes visible. In shifting from a symmetrical to an asymmetrical composition, Tolstoy introduces visual tension to his landscape just as the reader-viewer regards the enemy forces.

Tolstoy's approach to landscape descriptions changes slightly even from the beginning of *War and Peace* to the end. Earlier landscapes, as noted above, retain the three-plane division, but later, though he still divides his landscapes into sections, Tolstoy gives himself more freedom

¹²⁹ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 137 [Tolstoi, PSS, 9:167].

from strictly three-plane divisions. In the following passage, Tolstoy distinguishes two visual planes, the foreground and the background, but does not use the specific painting terminology previously identified in “Lucerne.” He opens the paragraph by designating his two planes, “all things far and near” (и на дальних, и на ближних предметах), and continues to describe in more detail what can be seen “in the distance” (вдалеке) and what appears “nearby” (вблизи).

On all things far and near there was that magically crystalline sheen which occurs only at that time of autumn. In the distance he could see the Sparrow Hills, with the village, the church, and a large white house. The bared trees, and the sand, and the stones, and the roofs of the houses, and the green spire of the church, and the angles of the distant white house—all this was etched with unnatural distinctness, with the finest lines, in the transparent air. Nearby he could see the familiar ruins of a half-burnt manor house... with still dark green lilac bushes growing along the fence. And even that ruined and befouled house, repulsively ugly in overcast weather, now, in the bright immobile brilliance, seemed something soothingly beautiful.

На всем, и на дальних, и на ближних предметах, лежал тот волшебнo-хрустальный блеск, который бывает только в эту пору осени. Вдалеке виднелись Воробьевы горы, с деревнею, церковью и большим белым домом. И оголенные деревья, и песок, и камни, и крыши домов, и зеленый шпиль церкви, и углы дальнего белого дома, всё это неестественно-отчетливо, тончайшими линиями вырезывалось в прозрачном воздухе. Вблизи виднелись знакомые развалины полуобгорелого барского дома, занимаемого французами, с темнозелеными еще кустами сирени, росшими по ограде. И даже этот разваленный и загаженный дом, отталкивающий своим безобразием в пасмурную погоду, теперь, в ярком, неподвижном блеске, казался чем-то успокоительно-прекрасным.¹³⁰

Though he divides the landscape into two major sections, he gives the image cohesion by noting in the first sentence that the entire scene is covered by “that magically crystalline sheen which occurs only at that time of autumn.” Despite variations in color, line, and texture, this “sheen” provides visual harmony much like the luster of oil paint on canvas. This technique appears in the previous passage as well. The landscape is first “covered by a muslin curtain of slanting rain” and later “in the sunlight objects became visible and clear in the distance, as if freshly varnished.” Tolstoy composes this second scene without shifting the balance to one side or the other. The cohesive composition of elements does not produce the same visual tension as in the first landscape and inspires a more calming and pleasant impression in the reader-viewer.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 1009–1010 [PSS, 12:93]

Tolstoy uses color, line, and texture to frame and either balance or create tension in his “paintings.” The appearance of certain vertical and horizontal elements leads the reader/viewer’s eye through the scene and make the center of the scene apparent. Tolstoy uses the horizontal line formed by the Sparrow Hills and the village for the upper edge of his “canvas.” The bottom edge consists of the “still dark green lilac bushes growing along the fence.” Like many landscape paintings, the darker colors appear in the foreground, making these objects seem closer and more material than the clouds or hilltops in the distance. By placing the reader into the scene through *repoussoir* and repetition of “one could see,” as seen in the first landscape scene, as well as focusing on the “immobile brilliance” in the second passage, Tolstoy calls attention to the momentary stoppage of time, and underscores instead one’s position in space. Krieger explains that “the spatial work freezes the temporal work even as the latter seeks to free it from space. Ekphrasis...use[s] a plastic object as a symbol of the frozen stilled world of plastic relationships which must be superimposed upon literature’s turning world to ‘still’ it.”¹³¹ In his landscapes, Tolstoy represents the tension between his work’s temporality and spatiality, describing not only the “immobile brilliance” of the view, but also the temporary immobility of plot in the novel.

III. The Portrait Gallery: Instances of Attributive and Associative Ekphrasis

Rimvydas Šilbajoris identifies “a kind of gradation, a hierarchy of response to art” in Tolstoy’s novels with painting at the top, followed by music, and literature at the bottom.¹³² Here again Tolstoy turns to the visual to communicate what the verbal cannot. This emphasis on not only the visual aesthetic, but also the process of its creation relates to Tolstoy’s frustration with

¹³¹ Krieger, *Illusion*, 265–266.

¹³² Šilbajoris, *Tolstoy’s Aesthetics*, 153.

the writing process in general, and his lack of confidence in the ability of verbal art to portray the visual. Though in his early stages of writing Tolstoy is most concerned with description, he still expresses an intense unease with the written word and its inability to convey the author's meaning to the reader. This unease continues throughout Tolstoy's *oeuvre* and is articulated by autobiographically-based characters in his works such as Konstantin Levin in *Anna Karenina*.

In his landscapes, we saw Tolstoy's most abstract ekphrasis, his "word paintings." It is in the descriptions of his characters that Tolstoy edges closer to the natural sign he so longed to create in his writing. He combats his discomfort with the verbal by referencing the visual arts to emphasize important concepts. This appears in his use of particular aspects of movements in painting to aid him in characterization, and the repetition of "visual epithets," an appeal to the natural sign.

Sometimes Tolstoy's use of the visual is rather abstract. For example, Natasha, who is often "displeased with her own words" and, like Tolstoy, senses that she is "not conveying the passionately poetic feeling which she had experienced"¹³³ in a certain moment, uses color and shape to convey her perceptions and feelings about Pierre and Boris to her mother. Boris is "so narrow, like a dining-room clock...Narrow, you know, gray, light gray..." while Pierre is "blue, dark blue with red, and he's rectangular." Natasha stumbles in her attempt to verbally replicate her feelings about Pierre for her mother. She says, "He's nice, dark blue with red, how can I explain to you..."¹³⁴ At other times, Tolstoy leaves the abstract behind and describes existing works of art through, what Robillard calls depictive ekphrasis.

Tolstoy, in what has become a signature of his stylistics, repeatedly describes certain physical traits of his characters. These repetitions are so frequent that they came to exasperate

¹³³ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 776.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 452.

some of his contemporaries. Ivan Turgenev, for instance, in a letter to Pavel Vasilievich Annenkov, writes “how painful are these premeditated, obstinate repetitions of one and the same trait—the little moustache on Princess Bolkonskaya’s upper lip and so on.”¹³⁵ Yet despite the at times overwhelming amount of appearances, these traits are not merely instances of superfluous detail, but rather carefully crafted visual manifestations of a character’s personality and moral fiber. They are, as Merezhkovsky notes, inseparably “bound up with deep-seated spiritual characteristics of the *dramatis personae*.”¹³⁶

Christian explains that “the essence of a Tolstoyan character is distilled into a mannerism, a gesture, a physical feature, an outward and visible sign which recurs continually and is the permanent property of that character.”¹³⁷ Such instances of synecdoche, what I will refer to as visual epithets, are exemplary of Tolstoy’s desire to create a natural sign by means of an arbitrary sign system. This type of signifier can get closer to the signified than linguistic signifiers like written or spoken words, which arise arbitrarily in relation to the signified. Tolstoy’s visual epithets are his most successful and concise creations of natural signs. Christian argues that, “they identify the person by something more meaningful than name, and less ossified than a stock epithet.”¹³⁸ In these cases the visual triumphs over the verbal in its ability to communicate the author’s meaning to the reader, it can “overcome the disadvantage of words and of the verbal art as mere arbitrary signs by forcing them to ape the natural signs and the natural-sign art that they cannot turn themselves into.”¹³⁹ Princess Lise becomes synonymous

¹³⁵ И как мучительны эти преднамеренные, упорные повторения одного и того же штриха -- усики на верхней губе княжны Болконской и т. д. I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati vos'mi tomakh: Tom sed'moi, pis'ma 1867–1869* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965): 65. English translation from Ivan Turgenev, *Turgenev's Letters, Vol. 2*, ed. and trans. by Davide Lowe (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983): 55.

¹³⁶ Dmitri Merezhkovski, *Tolstoi as Man and Artist with an Essay on Dostoevski* (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co. Ltd., 1902): 167.

¹³⁷ R. F. Christian, *Tolstoy's "War and Peace": A Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 148.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹³⁹ Krieger, *Illusion*, 6.

with a downy upper lip, Napoleon with small, soft white hands, Princess Marya with large, luminous eyes, and Hélène Kuragina with white, marble shoulders and bust. Sankovitch points out how “the use of diminutives to describe Lise’s distinctive trait— ‘little lip’ (*gubka*) and ‘tiny mustache hairs’ (*usiki*)...contributes to the reader’s sense of her as... rather limited in intellectual capacity.” When linked with her smile, the downy upper lip signals Lise’s child-like exuberance.¹⁴⁰ Napoleon’s small, soft hands “suggest effeminacy and the absence of work,”¹⁴¹ as well as his impotence as a military leader.

I. The Many Faces of Napoleon

The portrait Tolstoy paints of Napoleon in *War and Peace* is particularly interesting since it in many ways directly opposes several actual paintings of the French Emperor that Tolstoy would have been familiar with from his trips to the Louvre.¹⁴² He includes veiled references to some of the most iconic paintings of Napoleon, calling these stereotypical images to mind in order to juxtapose them with his own, less flattering portrait. These references are exemplary of what Robillard terms attributive ekphrasis: a text that somehow designates its visual source by directly naming or alluding to a specific painter, style, or genre, or through other indeterminate marking.¹⁴³ By referencing these paintings, even without including ekphrastic descriptions of them in the text, Tolstoy halts the narrative and places specific images before the reader’s eyes.

It is through Prince Andrei that Tolstoy alludes to two famous portraits of Napoleon, and through them that Tolstoy communicates Andrei’s admiration for Napoleon. In a discussion of Napoleon’s heroics, Andrei indirectly references the paintings *The Plague-stricken at Jaffa*

¹⁴⁰ Sankovitch, *Repetition*, 60–61.

¹⁴¹ Christian, *Tolstoy’s War and Peace*, 149.

¹⁴² Tolstoy visited the Louvre while on a trip to Paris in 1857, and during his year-long stay in the city from 1860 to 1861.

¹⁴³ Robillard, “In Pursuit of Ekphrasis,” 61.

(1804) (**Figure 3**) and *Napoléon au Pont d'Arcole* (**Figure 4**) (1796), both by well-known French painter Jean-Antoine Gros. Defending Napoleon's prowess as a military leader and Emperor, Andrei comments "Napoleon was a great man on the bridge of Arcole, and in the Jaffa hospital, when he shook hands with the plague victims."¹⁴⁴

In *Arcole*, Gros depicts a young Bonaparte, holding the standard as he leads his troops across the bridge at Arcole while under attack by the Austrians. He is calm in the face of danger, and, though known to be leading the troops, occupies the whole of the picture plane, underscoring his status as a great individual in history. In *Plague-stricken at Jaffa*, commissioned by Napoleon, Gros paints the Emperor in a manner that recalls religious paintings of Christ healing the lepers. He uses the contrast of light and shadow to give Napoleon an almost divine glow. Both paintings helped establish the myth of Napoleon despite their historical inaccuracies.¹⁴⁵ Tolstoy allows the reader to picture Napoleon through Andrei's eyes, as a brave, compassionate, leader, one of the great men of history.

Throughout the novel Tolstoy attempts to dismantle the myth of Napoleon and does so most effectively by challenging canonical images with his own verbal portraits. The great French Emperor becomes synonymous with his small, soft, plump, effeminate white hands. Tolstoy repeatedly describes Napoleons hands as small, white, and plump through the entirety of the novel. He also frequently mentions Napoleon's fat legs, corpulent body, and uncontrollable twitch in his face and left calf. In a scene set the night before the battle at Borodino, Tolstoy presents an especially grotesque picture of Napoleon: "snorting and grunting, he turned now his

¹⁴⁴ Наполеон как человек велик на Аркольском мосту, в госпитале в Яффе, где он чумным подает руку. Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 21 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 9:26].

¹⁴⁵ In reality, Napoleon was unable to lead his troops across the bridge during the battle of Arcole. After suffering huge losses, the army was forced to retreat. Though Napoleon did visit the plague victims in Jaffa and supposedly touched the sick with his bare hands, he later suggested that they be killed to alleviate their suffering.

fat back, now his hairy, fat chest under the brush with which a valet was rubbing his body...Napoleon's short hair was wet and tousled on his forehead. But his face, though swollen and yellow, expressed physical pleasure."¹⁴⁶ The bloated, pasty, and doughy man being brushed is a far cry from the trim, serious, dignified military figure in Gros' paintings. The comparisons of the canonical with the Tolstoyan Napoleon is emblematic of Tolstoy's claim, made through one of Karataev's proverbs, that "a word spoken is silver, unspoken is gold" (Сказанное слово серебряное, а не сказанное — золотое).¹⁴⁷ Such a statement is demonstrative of Tolstoy's discomfort with language, which leads him to borrow from other media in his art.

¹⁴⁶ Пофыркивая и побряхтывая, поворачивался то толстою спиной, то обросшею жирною грудью под щетку, которою камердинер растирал его тело... Короткие волосы Наполеона были мокры и спутаны на лоб. Но лицо его, хотя опухшее и желтое, выражало физическое удовольствие. Ibid., 777 [11:213].

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 843 [11:294].



Figure 3: Jean-Antoine Gros. *Napoleon Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-stricken at Jaffa*. 1804. Oil on canvas. 523 cm. x 715 cm. The Louvre Museum. Paris, France.



Figure 4: Jean-Antoine Gros. *Napoléon au Pont d'Arcole*. 1796. Oil on canvas. 130 cm. x 94 cm. Musée National du Château. Versailles, France.

II. Marya and Hélène: Religious Art and the Rococo

In a manner similar to his verbal landscape paintings, Tolstoy creates instances of associative ekphrasis in his descriptions of certain characters. He does not delve into lengthy descriptions of Marya and does not comment at length on the superficial and vapid aspects of

Hélène's character. Instead he employs visual epithets, natural signs, to signify in one or two images what would take much longer to communicate in words. For instance, descriptions of Princess Marya Bolkonskaya feature structural conventions of Russian iconography. Tolstoy repeatedly mentions her large, luminous eyes, filled with both love and sadness. These features resemble those found in figures in Russian Orthodox icons, who have large heads, long noses, elongated and thin fingers, small mouths, and large dark eyes. Marya shares physical similarities with icons of the Virgin, who is often depicted with dark eyes and a sad countenance. G. A. Akhmetova explains that Marya's face reminds Nikolai Rostov of "the face of the Mother of God...Marya appears for him [Nikolai] as a living icon."¹⁴⁸

Tolstoy underscores Princess Bolkonskaya's similarities to the Mother of God by naming her Marya. In addition to the structural similarities with icons, images of Marya also share theoretical conventions with Russian iconography. Tolstoy repeatedly mentions that an inner light breaks through Marya's eyes, making her more beautiful: "from her big eyes shone rays of a kindly and timid light. These eyes lit up her whole thin, sickly face and made it beautiful."¹⁴⁹ As Margaret E. Kenna explains, in icons' "faces are ascetic with large eyes... The size of the eyes is said to indicate preoccupation with spiritual matters, an ascetic life, and perception of divine illumination."¹⁵⁰ The luminosity of Marya's sad but beautiful large eyes can be seen as her deep spirituality peeking through the "windows to the soul." Since scholars like Akhmetova have

¹⁴⁸ Ее лицо напоминает ему телесно истонченный и духовно утонченный лик Божьей Матери... Марья предстает для него живой иконой. A. G. Akhmetova, "Ikona, ikonichnost' i kartina v romane L. N. Tolstogo 'Voyna i mir,'" *Filologiya i iskusstvovedeniye* 18.1 (2013):142.

¹⁴⁹ Из больших глаз ее светились лучи доброго и робкого света. Глаза эти освещали всё болезненное, худое лицо и делали его прекрасным. Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 107 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 9:130].

¹⁵⁰ Margaret E. Kenna, "Icons in Theory and Practice: An Orthodox Christian Example," *History of Religions*, 24.4, (May 1985): 354.

already discussed the similarities between Marya's physical appearance and icons at length, I will not address them in further detail.¹⁵¹

In sharp opposition to the deeply spiritual Marya, we turn to the overtly sexual and reductively decorative Hélène Kuragina. Given Tolstoy's abhorrence for "technique" in art, and his dismissive and disparaging comments about French schools of art in particular, it is especially damning that he uses conventions of Rococo¹⁵² painting in his descriptions of Hélène. Examples of French Rococo painting include Jean-Honoré Fragonard's iconic work *The Swing* (**Figure 5**) and his *Progress of Love: The Meeting* (**Figure 6**). In equating Hélène with French Rococo Tolstoy not only speaks to her character but uses her as a scathing social critique of the culture that created her. Tolstoy's use of Rococo elements was aptly timed, as the Rococo Revival occurred in France from the 1820s to the 1870s. Painters, architects, writers, and art collectors found renewed interest in the stylistics of the eighteenth-century movement.¹⁵³

The Rococo, deemed a feminine movement by its contemporaries, was primarily decorative. Wylie Sypher explains that "the decorative aspect takes precedence over characterization. The spectator's attention is wooed by noble proportions, accomplished grace of feature and bearing, and sublimely elegant costume."¹⁵⁴ Hélène serves a decorative purpose in the various salons and ballrooms she frequents. Her name alone is evidence of her association with beauty. When considering marriage, Pierre likens himself to "Paris taking possession of

¹⁵¹ For a discussion of iconography in Tolstoy see A. G. Akhmetova, "Ikona, ikonichnost'," and A. G. Akhmetova, "Ikona i kartina (portret) v romane L. N. Tolstogo 'Anna Karenina,'" *Filologiya i iskusstvovedeniye* 18.1 (2013):144–156.

¹⁵² Rococo comes from the French terms *barocco* (baroque) and *rocaille*, an elaborate decorative style of architecture of the 18th century characterized by the use of shells and small stones. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* defines Rococo as "the light, elegant, and sensuous style in the visual arts which originated in France at the beginning of the 18th century... it was said to have been coined in the 1790s... to refer disparagingly to the art produced during the reign of Louis XV." *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* 2nd ed., s.v. "Rococo."

¹⁵³ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* 2nd ed., s.v. "Rococo Revival."

¹⁵⁴ Wylie Sypher, *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature*, (New York: Random House): 53.

Helen” of Troy.¹⁵⁵ Rarely does her name appear in the novel without some mention of her physical beauty. Tolstoy repeatedly refers to her as “the beautiful Hélène.” She serves more as ornament than wife for Pierre, associated with the redecoration of his Petersburg home, which he chooses to do, “not knowing why himself” because “the architect had said it was needed.”¹⁵⁶ When Pierre thinks of their inevitable marriage Hélène’s “former words and looks” and “the words and looks of Anna Pavlovna when she spoke to him about his house” become one in his mind.¹⁵⁷ Once they are married the association of the new Countess Bezukhov and her husband’s property repeats when Tolstoy calls Pierre “the possessor of a beautiful wife and millions of rubles, in the big, newly done-over house” in St. Petersburg.¹⁵⁸

Just as Anna Karenina’s figure seems to step out of her portrait in Tolstoy’s later novel, Hélène seems to have emerged from one of Watteau’s or Fragonard’s canvases. These paintings feature pastel, silver, and white palettes, curvilinear elements inspired by rocks and shells, and “puppet-like figures”¹⁵⁹ dressed fashionable clothing and accessories. Hélène is one such figure, descriptions of whom often include references to her calm, empty, and “unchanging smile.”¹⁶⁰ Her face, like one in a painting, is fixed in a single expression. Describing Rococo paintings, Sypher notes how the viewer is “repeatedly confronted by the same good-natured smile, the same pleasant but unmemorable features—a kind of stereotyped face.”¹⁶¹ So too is Tolstoy’s reader-viewer bombarded with mentions of Hélène’s flawlessly generic, smiling face. At Anna Pavlovna’s soirée, she gets up “with the same unchanging smile of a perfectly beautiful woman

¹⁵⁵ Парис, обладающий Еленой. Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 211 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 9:258].

¹⁵⁶ архитектор сказал, что это нужно ему, и Пьер, сам не зная, зачем, отделявал свой огромный дом в Петербурге. Ibid., 207 [9:252].

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 207 [9:253].

¹⁵⁸ счастливым обладателем красавицы-жены и миллионов, в большом петербургском заново отделанном доме. Ibid., 214 [9:262].

¹⁵⁹ Sypher, *Rococo*, 28.

¹⁶⁰ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 11 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 9:14].

¹⁶¹ Sypher, *Rococo*, 53.

with which she had entered the drawing room,”¹⁶² and later smiles “that serene, beautiful smile which she smiled at everyone.”¹⁶³ As a decorative object her outer appearance is the most important aspect of her character. This unchanging smile becomes a natural sign not only of Hélène’s superficial and vapid character, but also of the corresponding values in Francophile Russian culture that view such anonymous and sterilized beauty as something desirable.

¹⁶² поднялась с тою же неизменною улыбкой вполне красивой женщины, с которою она вошла в гостиную. Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 11 [Tolstoi, PSS, 9:14].

¹⁶³ Элен оглянулась на Пьера и улыбнулась ему тою улыбкой, ясною, красивою, которою она улыбалась всем. Ibid., 205 [9:252].



Figure 5 Jean-Honoré Fragonard. *The Swing* ca. 1767. Oil on canvas. 81 cm x 64.2 cm. Wallace Collection, London, United Kingdom.



Figure 6 Jean-Honoré Fragonard. *The Progress of Love: The Meeting*. 1771–1773. Oil on canvas. 317.5 cm x 243.8 cm. The Frick Collection, New York, United States.

Tolstoy also calls attention to Hélène’s shoulders, bust, and back, which he often describes using variations of the adjectives white, marble, and classical (белый, мраморный, античный). Pierre admires “the extraordinary classical beauty of her body,”¹⁶⁴ and later Tolstoy

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 13 [9:15].

presents her “turning her beautiful head on her classical shoulders.”¹⁶⁵ He presents her again as simply a piece of ornament when he discusses her body as if it were made of marble. She is not a living, breathing woman—in fact at one-point Tolstoy supplements her breath with the sounds of her creaking corset—but rather a statue ornamenting whatever space she currently occupies. To Pierre, “her bust...had always looked like marble.” She later merges completely with superficial elements of her appearance, when “her marble beauty” appears to be “one with the gown.”¹⁶⁶ Tolstoy further compares Hélène to a decorative object when he links her with a piece of furniture. It is no coincidence that Pierre, in a fit of rage, threatens his marble wife with “the marble slab from a table.”¹⁶⁷ Tolstoy employs a natural sign to communicate Hélène’s unnatural, cold, sterile, and static nature. By repeating the image of marble, he forces the reader to recall images of classical Greek and Roman statues. These figures, merged with their clothing chiseled from the same white stone, are frozen in time, beautiful but unnatural, flawless but without any hint of human warmth. In his physical descriptions of Hélène, Tolstoy critiques not only the character but the societal norms that shaped her just as a sculptor fashions something out of marble or clay. Hélène is a statue come to life, the Galatea to Pierre’s Pygmalion.

IV. French Portraiture and Russian Iconography: Depictive Ekphrasis

Tolstoy uses a portrait of Napoleon II by François Gérard titled *Le Roi de Rome* (**Figure 7**) to criticize the theory of the Great Man in history, one of the major philosophical arguments in the novel.

It was a portrait painted in bright colors by Gérard of the boy born to Napoleon ...A quite handsome curly-haired boy with a gaze resembling the gaze of Christ in the Sistine Madonna was depicted playing bilboquet. The ball represented the terrestrial globe and the stick in his other hand a scepter. It was not entirely clear precisely what the painter meant to express by presenting the so-called king of Rome skewering the terrestrial globe with a stick, but the allegory, to all those who had seen the picture in Paris, and to Napoleon himself,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 16 [9:20].

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 206 [9:251–252].

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 320 [10:32].

obviously seemed clear and quite pleasing...with a typically Italian capacity for changing facial expression at will, he went up to the portrait and assumed a look of thoughtful tenderness. He felt what he said and did now—was history. And it seemed to him that the best thing he could do now—he with his grandeur, owing to which his some played bilboquet with the terrestrial globe—was to show, in contrast to that grandeur, the most simple fatherly tenderness.

Это был яркими красками написанный Жераром портрет мальчика, рожденного от Наполеона... Весьма красивый, курчавый мальчик со взглядом похожим на взгляд Христа в Сикстинской мадонне, изображен был играющим в бильбоке. Шар представлял земной шар, а палочка в другой руке — изображала скипетр. Хотя не совсем ясно было, что именно хотел выразить живописец, представив так называемого короля Рима протыкающим земной шар палочкой, но аллегория эта, так же, как и всем видевшим картину в Париже, так и Наполеону очевидно показалась ясною и весьма понравилась... С свойственною итальянцам способностью изменять произвольно выражение лица, он подошел к портрету и сделал вид задумчивой нежности. Он чувствовал, что то, что он скажет и сделает теперь — есть история. И ему казалось, что лучшее, что он может сделать теперь — это то, чтоб он с своим величием, вследствие которого сын его в бильбоке играл земным шаром, чтоб он выказал, в противоположность этого величия, самую простую отеческую нежность.¹⁶⁸

In his description of the portrait Tolstoy includes both the name of the well-known artist, Gérard, and strategically mentions that the child's expression resembles that of Christ in Raphael's *The Sistine Madonna* (

Figure). Tolstoy's choice to reference a work by Raphael at this time is interesting. As Eikhenbaum explains, during the early stages of writing *War and Peace*, Tolstoy began collecting colored prints, works "considered aesthetically banal and shunned by subtle connoisseurs and talented imitators," and for which Tolstoy was mocked by his acquaintance Boris Chicherin. In a letter to Chicherin, Tolstoy responded "When Raphael, with his potato-knobblly forms, seems offensive to me, and when Grenier's little pictures move me, I don't doubt for a minute that Grenier is superior to Raphael."¹⁶⁹ Here the theory of great men applies both to history and to painting. It is not the most well-known or canonically revered figure who controls the course of history or is solely responsible for the creation of great art, not the Napoleons, Raphaels, or Gérards, but the anonymous or seemingly insignificant people.

¹⁶⁸ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 779 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 11:215–216].

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Boris Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoi in the Sixties*, translated by Duffield White (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982): 145.



Figure 7: François Gérard. *François-Charles Napoléon, roi de Rome (1812)*. Oil on canvas 60cm. x 49cm. Palace of Versailles, Versailles, France.



Figure 8: Raphael. *Sistine Madonna*. 1513–1514. Oil on canvas. 265cm. x 196cm. Gemäldegalerie Alter Meister. Dresden, Germany.

Tolstoy also focuses on how Napoleon believes he should act a certain way when looking at the portrait. Believing this moment would be historical, Napoleon becomes too involved in his own performance, and cannot really engage with the painting. Tolstoy includes the reactions of how other people react to the portrait as well. In doing so he accentuates the foolishness of this

worship of Napoleon, of the great men of history. He explains how the French “cried ‘Vive l’Empereur!’ on seeing the depiction of the boy skewering the terrestrial globe with a bilboquet stick; just as they would cry ‘Vive l’Empereur!’ to any nonsense that was told to them.”¹⁷⁰

For the French, the art object is simply another manifestation of hero worship. Not only do they clamor to act in the correct fashion to please Napoleon, they are also admiring the portrait of Napoleon’s son, the next in line to the throne of the great man of history. The infant holds a bilboquet stick like a scepter and a small globe in his tiny, plump, white hands, a visual echo of Napoleon I’s idea that he alone holds the world in his and can shape its history.

Later in the novel, an adjutant tells Pierre about a count who was arrested for treason. The adjutant, toward the end of the story, tells Pierre that the count’s father owns an inn, in which “there’s a big icon of God Almighty, you know, holding a scepter in one hand and an orb in the other; so he took it home for a few days, and what did he do! He found some scoundrel of a painter...”¹⁷¹ The icon resembles the portrait of Napoleon II, and, by referring to the “scoundrel of a painter” who took the icon home, implies that the image was desecrated in some way. Tolstoy links a defiled icon with the portrait of Napoleon’s son, the heir to the “antichrist’s” empire. This is the second reference in the novel to a painting in which a member of the Bonaparte dynasty is portrayed as a Christ-like figure. For Tolstoy, who calls all people “involuntary instruments of history,”¹⁷² and who argues that “a man who plays a role in a historical event never understands its significance,”¹⁷³ Napoleon’s mythical image is particularly repugnant.

¹⁷⁰ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 784–785 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 11:216].

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 847.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 682.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 944.



Figure 9: *The Mother of God Smolenskaya*. Mid-16th Century. Egg tempera on wood. 74.5cm x 52.5cm x 3.8cm.
The British Museum. London, United Kingdom.

This critique becomes even more powerful when the reactions of the French to the portrait of Napoleon II are juxtaposed with the interactions of the Russian soldiers with the Smolenskaya Mother of God icon (**Figure 9**).

Soldiers and officers carried a large, dark-faced icon in a case. This was the icon brought out of Smolensk, which had since been carried around with the army. Behind the icon, around it, in front of it, on all sides, crowds of bareheaded soldiers walked, ran, and bowed to the ground...a huge crowd of bareheaded officers, soldiers, and militiamen surrounded the icon...[Pierre] was not looking at them [his acquaintances]: his whole attention was absorbed by the serious expression of the faces in this crowd of soldiers and militiamen who gazed with uniform eagerness at the icon...all the faces lit up again with the same expression of awareness of the solemnity of the present moment that he had seen on the faces at the foot of the hill in Mozhaïsk and had glimpsed on many, many faces he had met that morning...Despite the presence of the commander in chief, who drew the attention of all the higher ranks, the militiamen and soldiers, without looking at him, went on praying.

Солдаты и офицеры несли большую, с черным ликом в окладе, икону. Это была икона, вывезенная из Смоленска и с того времени возимая за армией. За иконой, кругом ее, впереди ее, со всех сторон шли, бежали и кланялись в землю с обнаженными головами толпы военных... Огромная толпа с открытыми головами офицеров, солдат, ополченцев окружала икону...не смотрел на них: всё внимание его было поглощено серьезным выражением лиц в этой толпе солдат и ополченцев, однообразно-жадно смотревших на икону...на всех лицах вспыхивало опять то же выражение сознания торжественности наступающей минуты, которое он видел под горой в Можайске и урывками на многих и многих лицах, встреченных им в это утро... Несмотря на присутствие главнокомандующего, обратившего на себя внимание всех высших чинов, ополченцы и солдаты, не глядя на него, продолжали молиться.¹⁷⁴

For them, art is a unifying force. The infectious religious feeling inspired by the icon brings men and women of all social stations to one and the same level. Tolstoy describes how the viewers' faces express "uniform eagerness." The sense of spiritual community, of *sobornost'*, is highlighted when Pierre notes that the faces in the crowd resembled so many other faces he had seen that day in response to the icon. The religious feeling transcends time, space, and rank. Unlike the French soldiers, who react to Napoleon II's portrait in an artificial, performative manner to please the Emperor, The Russian soldiers are so engrossed in their experience of the icon that they are unaware of or ignore the presence of the commander in chief and continue praying. The reactions of the French compared with the Russians to a work of art speaks more to their respective natures and moralities than could be explained in paragraphs of text. The reader, like those crowded around the icon, stops moving forward in the novel and is arrested in time by a work of art.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 763–764 [11:196–197].

Arguably his most famous work of fiction, and by far the longest, *War and Peace* is a tribute to Tolstoy's extreme discomfort with and distrust of literature as an art form. This "loose baggy monster," consisting of over eleven hundred pages, describes a period of only fourteen years: 1805 to 1819. However, the work lacks any meaningful dénouement or even a clear beginning. The novel is a depiction of a moment in time, a single frame in progression of history. Tolstoy seems to halt the forward flow of time by repeatedly drawing attention to the space of the novel. He forces his reader to stop and take in the surrounding details. As a work composed of almost all "middle," *War and Peace* draws greater attention to and bestows larger significance to singular, self-contained moments. Given his distrust of the written word to accurately communicate reality to the reader, it is no surprise that Tolstoy turns to the visual arts for the means to "infect" his reader with truth. He uses the arbitrary sign system of language to create a series of natural signs, that is visual signifiers (images) which directly correspond to the signified.

War and Peace, as the author himself states, is not a novel. The continuous interruptions of plot progression, preference for cyclical over linear time, long descriptions, and inclusion of multiple perspectives from an astoundingly large cast of characters break the main conventions of the traditional novel and of temporal art in general. Tolstoy describes and alludes to both real and fictional works of art through instances of depictive ekphrasis and creates his own verbal "paintings" through attributive and associative ekphrasis, one of the many devices of spatial art Tolstoy employs in the work. To return to Lessing, literature and other verbal arts are considered temporal as they deal with the progression of plot, with sequences of events. Spatial arts such as painting and sculpture by their nature cannot portray sequences of events. Instead they illustrate singular moments in time, much like many of the self-contained scenes in *War and Peace*. Thus,

I argue that *War and Peace* is less a work of literature and more akin to an art gallery through which the reader-viewer can roam, taking in the various canvases depicting landscapes, portraits, and battle scenes.

CHAPTER THREE: *Anna Karenina: A Novel Between Word and Image*

In a letter to poet Afanasy Fet on August 25, 1875, while working on his novel *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy wrote, “for two months I have not stained my hands with ink or my heart with thoughts.”¹⁷⁵ His aesthetic struggle manifests in this description of writer’s block when compared with an earlier discussion of the writing process, which he describes as a time when, “at the ink-spotted desk, [I] take out the grey paper and ink, smear my fingers and draw letters on the paper. The letters form words, the words—phrases.”¹⁷⁶ This earlier discussion deals in terms more suited to the visual arts than the verbal; Tolstoy draws and smears the letters on the page. Years later, in 1875, he retains the visceral image of ink-stained hands that draw and shape his words, but couples it with the concept of thoughts. Thoughts (мысли) are harbingers of the verbal rather than the visual. The deceptively simple comment “I have not stained my hands with ink or my heart with thoughts,” demonstrates how, at this point in his artistic career, Tolstoy occasionally finds himself in a conundrum, caught between images and words, between a conception of the creative process as something inherently visual or as a linguistic endeavor.

During this period, Tolstoy shifts back and forth between literature and nonfiction writings, particularly essays on pedagogy. In June 1874, he writes, “I find myself in a summer frame of mind, that is, not occupied with poetry, and have stopped printing my novel and want to drop it, so much do I dislike it; but I am busy with practical matters, namely pedagogy.”¹⁷⁷ It appears that in his mind at this time, didactic writings and literature are mutually exclusive, and he abandons his novel for “practical” subjects. When he returns to *Anna Karenina*, especially in part

¹⁷⁵ Я два месяца не пачкал рук чернилами и сердца мыслями. Tolstoi, PSS 62:199.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 46:64.

¹⁷⁷ Boris Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoy in the Seventies*, translated by Albert Kaspin (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982), 115.

VIII which was added on later, Tolstoy writes with a noticeably different tone that Eikhenbaum describes as, “ever more like the pages of the author’s diary.”¹⁷⁸ Viewed from a visual angle, I argue that *Anna Karenina* also contains a mixture of visual devices—it features elements of Tolstoy’s future aesthetic and moralizing tone, while simultaneously holding on to the vestiges of his earlier, more “painterly” and philosophically open work. The novel contains the negotiation between two aesthetics, “a dialectic unity that emerged as the result of complex intellectual processes experienced by the author himself.”¹⁷⁹ I argue that it is in the writing of *Anna Karenina*, an aesthetic and philosophical turning point, Tolstoy furtively tries to work out the complexities of different art forms and eventually advocates for a hybrid medium in which aspects of the visual arts augment the verbal representation of the author’s and his characters’ personal realities.

One scene in particular encapsulates the novel’s transitory nature: the process that leads to Kitty and Levin’s engagement. The couple’s betrothal is the result of an act that transcends language. In this scene, Levin approaches Kitty, who is drawing (чертит) on a green felt table with chalk. She moves as if she is about to stand and leave, but Levin tells her he has long wanted to ask her something. Instead of traditional dialogue, they communicate through a type of compressed language, drawing only the first letter of each word on the table. They convey meaning through pieces of language rather than through entire words.

Here Tolstoy breaks down the arbitrary signs of words into single letters, simplifying them and bringing them closer to natural signs, or images. Knapp argues that, “although Levin and Kitty appear to transcend the fallen language of the Oblonsky realm as they engage in

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 125.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 111–112.

‘mystic intercourse’... the underlying message is that what really matters should not be entrusted to human speech.”¹⁸⁰ Later, when Dolly talks with Kitty about the proposal, she asks, “‘what words did he say?’ ‘What words did Kostya say to you?’ (Но какие слова он говорил? — Какие тебе Костя говорил?).” Kitty replies “‘He wrote in chalk. It was wonderful’ (он писал мелом. Это было удивительно).”¹⁸¹ While Dolly focuses specifically on the words that were said, repeating the word which (какие), Kitty remembers only the act of writing and the emotions it inspired in her, the words are no longer important. Kitty and Levin’s means of communication lies somewhere between image and language just as the novel exists between spatial and temporal art.

Spatial arts, traditionally the visual arts of painting, sculpture, and drawing, depict a single moment in time—one expression on the face in a portrait, a landscape frozen in time, soldiers poised mid battle. Not only does the medium itself depict a single instant, the viewers in their interaction with the work, are temporarily stopped in a single space as events and time move forward past them. The temporal arts, poetry and prose, deal with the progression of time, several events depicted in a sequence, most often in chronological order. The European realist novel, in its reliance on traditional narrative techniques and composition, can be seen as the epitome of temporal art. I argue that *Anna Karenina* simultaneously conforms to some of the conventions of a European realist novel like *Madame Bovary*, and critiques and subverts other aspects of the genre, causing some scholars to deem it a step towards modernism. As I show in this chapter, many of these subversions are tied to the pictorial nature of the work, including

¹⁸⁰ Liza Knapp, *Anna Karenina and Others: Tolstoy's Labyrinth of Plots* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 177.

¹⁸¹ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 509 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 19:128].

several ekphrastic moments, meaning carried by images and color, and open discussion of painting and the process of creating a work of art, both visual and literary.

I. The Failure of Words

Throughout the novel, Tolstoy openly criticizes language's ability to communicate truth and inspire genuine feeling in the reader through his characters. Knapp notes, "the anxiety that surfaces in Tolstoy's works about the limits and obscurities of language from *Childhood* on comes to a head in *Anna Karenina*."¹⁸² This open critique of language is a relatively new development in Tolstoy's work. Though the distrust of language is present since the beginning of his career, it is not until *Anna Karenina* that Tolstoy purposefully articulates it in his fiction. In "Lucerne" for example, though he relies on the striking visuality of his prose and techniques common in painting, Tolstoy presents the story in the frame of Nekhliudov's diary. The complete title is "Lucerne: From the Recollections of Prince Nekhliudov." Nekhliudov communicates his feelings and thoughts through language. Tolstoy's critique of language does not appear explicitly, but rather is apparent in his use of painting techniques and reliance on the visual nature of his descriptions. In *War and Peace* as well, the critique of language comes through Tolstoy's writing style and affinity for visual epithets and landscape painting composition rather than in overt discussions by his characters about language, the creative process, and art in general.

In *Anna Karenina*, the discussion of language and its failures becomes a more overt aspect. Justin Weir points out that, "The truths of Tolstoy's absolute statements often reside in the 'negative space' that prepares the reader for an important image or visual composition...what

¹⁸² Knapp, *Anna*, 173.

you cannot visualize in the language of the novel prepares you for what you can visualize.”¹⁸³ Tolstoy underscores the importance of the visual as it relates to personal truth by showing how his characters become frustrated with words, and struggle to convey meaning with them. For instance, in the novel’s opening scene Stiva Oblonsky tries to recall a dream but is unable. He remarks, “and there were so many more excellent things to it, even awake you could never put it all into words and ideas” (мысли).¹⁸⁴ Other characters, like Anna, note how words are often devoid of meaning or used to veil rather than communicate truth. Surprised at how easily she is able to lie, she is shocked at “how natural her words were...she felt as if she were wearing an impenetrable armor of falsehood.”¹⁸⁵ Karenin is also aware of the empty meaning in his and his wife’s words to one another. He “no longer ascribed any significance to” Anna’s tone, and “heard only her words and gave them only the direct meaning they had.”¹⁸⁶ Here Tolstoy presents words as false signifiers no longer attached to the correct signified. He shows the way that words can be manipulated and misused.

In another scene, Levin becomes Tolstoy’s mouthpiece as he experiences words as empty signifiers, robbed of their signifieds. Levin, recalling Fyodor Tyutchev’s poem “Silentium,” becomes frustrated when his brother Sergei tries to describe the beauty of nature as they walk through the woods on his estate. The narrator remarks that “Konstantin Levin did not like to talk or hear about the beauty of nature. Words robbed him of the beauty of what he saw.”¹⁸⁷ Knapp compares Levin to a Pascalian protagonist who “regards language as a prison house and the

¹⁸³ Justin Weir, “Tolstoy Sees the Truth but Waits: The Consequences of Aesthetic Vision in *Anna Karenina*,” in Knapp and Mandelker eds., *Approaches to Teaching Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003), 179.

¹⁸⁴ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 3–4, [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 18:4]. Here again Tolstoy associates thoughts (мысли) (translated here as ideas) with words and narrative.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.

universe as *cachot*.”¹⁸⁸ She explains that, in the novel, a character “who seeks God needs to apprehend the obscurity and futility of language in order to transcend it and feel divine love.”¹⁸⁹ In semiotic terms, the represented object is diluted when the arbitrary linguistic sign is attached to it. To compensate for the shortcomings of language, Tolstoy creates what Thomas Dyne calls a “visual language” of looks and gestures in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.¹⁹⁰ This “visual language,” what I call a hybrid artistic medium, consists not only of the facial expressions and gestures that Dyne identifies, but also the author’s use of various types of ekphrasis, didactic color imagery, and attention to the physical spaces of the novel in addition to the actions contained within the plot.

Many scholars have discussed Tolstoy’s characteristic use of physical attributes, gestures, and facial expressions, and it is for this focus on physical features that Dmitri Merezhkovsky calls Tolstoy a “seer of the flesh.” While his characters often communicate more truthfully through gestures and glances, Tolstoy does so through the creation of natural signs. “Tolstoy’s attention to concrete, everyday objects and his emphasis on his heroes’ cardinal physical traits... [are] cognitive strategies he uses to evoke vivid, life-like mental images of his characters,” that is, to craft natural signs from arbitrary ones.¹⁹¹ I expand on this idea of a “visual language,” moving beyond facial expressions and gestures to include images that take on symbolic meaning. Unlike words, which Tolstoy presents as detached from their signifieds, images in the novel often take on additional signifieds, making them fuller with meaning. Sometimes these images

¹⁸⁸ Knapp, *Anna*, 175.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Dyne, “Silent Scenes of Interpretation: Visual and Verbal Language in Tolstoy’s Narrative,” *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, Vol. XXVII (2016): 7–16.

¹⁹¹ Sarah Beth Mohler, *The Prosaics of the Mind’s Eye: Reader Visualization, Perspectival Engagement, and the Visual Ethics of Tolstoy’s ‘War and Peace’* PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2006, iii.

become central to the novel, while others are small elements of foreshadowing to the careful reader.

One of these smaller instances of foreshadowing occurs at the ball where Anna and Vronsky share their first dance. As Morson explains, “the very term ‘foreshadowing’ derives from a spatial metaphor of time. If we are walking down a curved path, we may see the shadow of an object before we see the object casting the shadow.”¹⁹² At the ball, Anna wears a low-cut black dress trimmed with Venetian lace, and “on her head, in her dark hair... was a small garland of pansies and the same garland on the black ribbon threaded through the white lace at her waist.”¹⁹³ The pansy (анютины глазки), from French pensée (thought), is the flower of remembrance. However, it can also symbolize love triangles and, in dreams signifies an upcoming romantic encounter. In folklore, if a woman carries pansies with her, or wears them on her dress, it will attract love. In his use of symbolic images, Tolstoy gives more meaning to natural signs beyond their original signification of the objects they represent. This doubling of meaning for visual signs, when compared with the repeated presentation of words as empty signifiers, shows Tolstoy’s attempts to reconcile his use of a literary medium in which he does not have complete confidence, by augmenting the language of the novel with a new language or system of images and symbols. It is this system of images that makes *Anna Karenina* perhaps Tolstoy’s most ekphrastic novel.

II. Word and Image Collide

¹⁹² Tolstoy, *Anna*, xi.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 74.

Tolstoy engages with different art forms more directly in *Anna Karenina* than in any of his previous works. While many of his characters comment on the inability of language to sufficiently capture reality and communicate meaning, they do not venture into discussions of literature itself. The narrator notes in passing that Vronsky reads French novels, for example, or that Karenin “never missed anything that made a sensation” in the sphere of the arts and though “art was utterly alien to his nature...[he] considered it his duty to read everything.”¹⁹⁴ Similarly, Stiva “read a liberal newspaper...advocating the viewpoint maintained by the majority... neither science nor art nor politics held any particular interest for him.”¹⁹⁵ Only Anna and Levin, the novel’s two central characters, engage in the act of literary production. Anna writes a children’s book and Levin a work on estate management. Both, as Mandelker points out, are authors who fail to complete their literary works.¹⁹⁶ Anna observes that, her “writing is like those carved baskets made in prison...these wretches made miracles of patience.”¹⁹⁷ Levin also has difficulty writing, a struggle that mirrors Tolstoy’s own complicated relationship with and attitudes toward his own writing. Like Tolstoy, Levin dismisses, returns to, and eventually abandons his book again.

It is interesting that the only creative works that are started and completed in the novel are examples of authentic art made by Mikhailov, and that these are not works of prose, but rather drawings and paintings. Tolstoy draws attention to the dialectic between word and image when he notes that in Mikhailov’s painting, Christ’s face expresses a “consciousness of the vanity of words.”¹⁹⁸ In a letter to Strakhov in 1873 discussing his work on *Anna Karenina*,

¹⁹⁴ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 104.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹⁶ Amy Mandelker, “A Painted Lady: *Ekphrasis* in *Anna Karenina*,” *Comparative Literature* 43.1 (Winter 1991), 4.

¹⁹⁷ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 637.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 785.

Tolstoy writes, “as a painter needs light for the finishing touches, so I need inner light, of which I always feel the lack in autumn.”¹⁹⁹ It seems, as it did in “A Few Words Apropos of War and Peace” that Tolstoy related more to a painter than a writer. Mikhailov, the only one to complete his works, also serves as an aesthetic moral compass in *Anna Karenina* and a moral ideal which Tolstoy strove emulate.

Throughout the novel, Tolstoy compares literature and painting in terms of their ability to engage and, especially, to communicate reality to their respective audiences. Characters particularly struggle to remain engaged by works of literature but become completely absorbed in painting. For example, Tolstoy describes Karenin at home reading in his chair, above which “hung an oval portrait of Anna, in a gilt frame, beautifully executed by a famous artist.” Tolstoy illustrates Karenin’s interaction with the portrait as if it were with a living person, a continuation of Anna and Karenin’s last conversation. After looking at the portrait, “impenetrable eyes regarded him with derision and impudence, as on that last evening of their interview.” The painting has a considerable effect on Karenin’s state of mind. He has a physical reaction to Anna’s chilling expression; he shudders, looks away, and his hurried movements illustrate his agitated state. Usually able to lose himself in his work, the emotional impact wrought by his wife’s portrait continually breaks Karenin’s concentration.

The sight of the black lace on her head, her black hair, and her beautiful white hand with a middle finger covered with rings, all done so excellently by the artist, had an unbearably impudent and provocative effect on Alexei Alexandrovich. After studying the portrait for a minute, Alexei Alexandrovich shuddered...and he turned away. Hurriedly sitting down in the armchair, he opened his book. He made an attempt at reading but could not seem to restore his once quite lively interest.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Translation from Christian, *Tolstoy’s Letters, Volume I*, 265.

²⁰⁰ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 262 [18:300].

Tolstoy emphasizes how Karenin starts and stops reading during this scene. In doing so, he shows how the visual can be far more striking, more engaging, and bring its viewer much closer to his or her personal reality than the written word can take the reader. Weir identifies an interesting paradox in the novel, explaining how the “language in the novel cannot capture the visual essence of the portrait, yet the portrait exists only insofar as it is described by the novel’s language.”²⁰¹ Tolstoy rather self-consciously criticizes the verbal arts using the very medium he critiques, and advocates for a hybridity of art forms, a combination of the verbal and visual, that can come closer to the artist’s or character’s truth than a single art form could alone.

It is in Anna’s internal musings that the most striking critique of the literary arts takes place. On the train home to St. Petersburg following her visit to her brother in Moscow, Anna intermittently reads an English novel. Though she understood what she read, “she found it unpleasant to read, that is, to follow the reflection of other people’s lives. She herself wanted too much to live. If she read about the novel’s heroine tending to a patient, she wished she could take silent steps around the patient’s room...but there was nothing she could do, and [so]... she forced herself to read.”²⁰² I argue that in this scene, Tolstoy demonstrates that the literary arts alone are often insufficient to draw the reader in. Anna remains unfulfilled by the novel she is reading. Unlike Mikhailov’s painting, which seems to come to life before Vronsky and Levin, the divide between life and art remains intact in Anna’s English novel. The word on its own cannot transport her into the reality of the novel or instill her with the emotions of the characters.

Tolstoy juxtaposes the power of words with that of images again when Anna begins to picture things from her time in Moscow. She continues her attempt to read “but now definitely

²⁰¹ Weir, “Tolstoy Sees the Truth,” 177.

²⁰² Ibid., 93.

could not understand what she was reading... all these images and sounds in this shifting half-dark stunned her with their extraordinary vividness.” The images overpower words and, in their closeness to reality, are able to transport Anna in a way her English novel cannot. Through these images she enters a new reality, momentarily losing her bearing on her surroundings. “She was constantly beset by moments of doubt as to whether the car was going forward or back or standing still altogether.”²⁰³ In this scene the spatiality of images trumps the linearity of novel. Anna is unsure of the direction she is headed, if any at all. Tolstoy arrests her in space as she reviews different images from her memory. It is in the combination of media, the verbal representation of a visual experience, that Tolstoy shows successful in taking his character deeper into her personal experience of reality.

Later in the novel, in one of the most iconic moments of ekphrasis in Russian literature, Levin views Mikhailov’s portrait of Anna, which appears to be a living woman who steps out of the frame and engages with the viewer.

Levin looked at the portrait, which, in the brilliant illumination, projected out of its frame, and he could not tear himself away from it. He even forgot where he was, and not listening to what was being said, he did not take his eyes off the amazing portrait. This was not a picture but a splendid, living woman with black waving hair, bared shoulders and arms, and a pensive half-smile on her lips, which were covered with a tender bloom, who looked at him triumphantly and tenderly with disarming eyes. Only, because she was not alive, she was even more beautiful than a living woman could be.²⁰⁴

Tolstoy arrests the reader alongside Levin in a single moment in time, allowing the aesthetic space of the portrait to dominate. Levin does not hear what is said around him and he forgets where he is. This marked comparison between the verbal and visual arts demonstrates the inability of the traditional novel to bring its realities to life. Tolstoy also shows the ability of visual arts to distort reality in some cases, noting that the woman in the portrait is still composed

²⁰³ Ibid., 94.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 634 [19:273].

of paint and canvas, and is more beautiful than a real woman could possibly be. Thus, he advocates for a hybrid medium, the verbal augmented by the visual, which is able to immerse the reader-view in the reality of the novel. Amy Mandelker discusses the different portraits of Anna in detail, calling portraiture “the thread that stitches together the themes of aesthetics and representation.”²⁰⁵

Mandelker interrogates Tolstoy’s use of depictive ekphrasis in philosophical terms, arguing that artistic vision in *Anna Karenina* “serves as emblem, *imago*, or icon of the spiritual, or conversely, acquires the demonic character of profane” representation.²⁰⁶ My examination of ekphrasis in *Anna Karenina* includes more abstract types of ekphrasis, those subtler than the description of paintings including veiled references to works of art, the use of painting and sculpture vocabulary in metaphors and similes, and descriptions in the novel that in one way or another resemble a work of visual art either in content, composition, or technique. I also examine ekphrasis in the novel as it relates to Tolstoy’s overarching visual aesthetic that shifts throughout his *oeuvre*. Unlike Mandelker, my approach is informed by semiotics, arguing that Tolstoy’s use of ekphrasis in *Anna Karenina* relates to his desire to come as close as possible to creating natural signs through language.

Tolstoy creates a unique texture in his novel using varying types of ekphrasis. The portraits discussed above are the most canonical examples of ekphrasis in the novel. Through more diffuse ekphrastic moments, those that reference technique of a visual medium or hint at a specific movement or work without direct citation, Tolstoy augments his presentation of characters and locations by placing them directly before the viewers eyes. Though it appears that

²⁰⁵ Mandelker, “Painted Lady,” 2.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

he champions the visual arts over the literary, his attitudes, especially at this time, are not yet this strict. Tolstoy does not advocate for one form over the other. Rather, he identifies the strengths and weaknesses of both and through his use of visual art techniques in the novel, proposes a synthesis of visual and verbal art, a hybrid medium capable of that which a single medium alone is not.

III. Painted Ladies and Wax Dolls

In earlier works Tolstoy appeared more comfortable with the visual's ability to represent reality. As his career develops, his relationship with the visual, particularly the visual arts of painting and sculpture, becomes more complex. It begins to become apparent in *War and Peace*, and grows to explicit discussion in *Anna Karenina* that, not all art is created equal in Tolstoy's eyes. He uses references to and techniques of different media to critique false art and its consumers. One of the more well-known critiques of "counterfeit" art is the mocking way in which Tolstoy discusses Vronsky's flirtation with painting. He notes that, "just as a starving animal snatches at any object that comes its way, hoping to find sustenance in it, so too did Vronsky quite unconsciously snatch first at politics, then at new books, and then at paintings."²⁰⁷ In comparing Vronsky to a hungry animal, Tolstoy calls attention to the connection between society art and physical pleasure, indulgence, and consumption. Vronsky's devouring of books and paintings is akin to Nekhludov's "animal nature" in *Resurrection*, that part of his personality responsible for his moral decline and Maslova's downfall.²⁰⁸ Like Vronsky, Nekhludov also dabbled in painting. However, Nekhludov actively chose to abandon landscape

²⁰⁷ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 426.

²⁰⁸ Tolstoy describes this side of Nekhludov's personality as "an animal nature, absorbed in self-gratification and seeking pleasure at the expense of the rest of the world...developed by his residence in Petersburg and intercourse with army society, the animal nature seemed to have won the day." Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, 67.

painting since he found his work to be devoid of meaning. Vronsky, a character morally inferior to *Resurrection*'s Nekhliudov, lacks this level of introspection and unwittingly stops painting as he does any number of other leisurely pass times.

While in many instances Tolstoy uses images to move closer to reality, he also demonstrates how others are diluted of meaning. *Anna Karenina* sees the beginnings of an internal disruption for Tolstoy, a clash of aesthetics and conceptions of art and literature. Returning again to Vronsky's painting, we see a telling comparison of his false art with a wax doll, an image devoid of meaning, a copy without an original. Tolstoy describes Mikhailov's thought process as he finds himself disgusted by Vronsky's false art.

He knew he could not forbid Vronsky to amuse himself with painting...One cannot forbid someone to make himself a big wax doll and kiss it. But if this person with the doll were to come and sit down before a man in love and begin caressing his doll the way the lover caressed his beloved, the lover would find it distasteful. Mikhailov experienced the very same distaste at the sight of Vronsky's painting; he found it laughable, and annoying, and pathetic, and offensive.²⁰⁹

Tolstoy's comparison of Vronsky's painting with a wax doll attacks this type of counterfeit art from several angles. Vronsky's wax doll resembles Tolstoy's description of false art as a prostitute in "What is Art?" The wax doll exists solely for the gratification of physical needs. As a lifeless object, one that is all surface and no depth, Vronsky cannot form any sort of human connection with it. We cannot help but compare Anna as Vronsky's lover, the Anna in the portrait, to this automaton. In this comparison, Tolstoy shows the degradation of Anna to a cliché, and critiques her pursuit of sexual gratification at the expense of her family. His pointed use of the visual here demonstrates Tolstoy's clearer ideological motive in his use of the visual arts.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 438 [19:47].

Tolstoy presents a scathing critique of such members of society in his discussion of shallow society women. Many of these women, the epitome of artifice who conceal their natural bodies beneath layers of makeup, clothing, jewelry, and false hair, are the ultimate consumers of this false art. Levin encounters a “painted Frenchwoman...with ringlets” whom he finds “loathsome.” In his description of this seemingly insignificant character, “the painted Frenchwoman, all ribbons, lace, and ringlets...all composed, it seemed...of false hair, *poudre de riz*, and *vinaigre de toilette*, Tolstoy shows that these women are nothing more than decorative casings lacking anything inside.”²¹⁰ He shows that the origin of this standard of beauty is French in origin, just as he will do with the aesthetics of counterfeit art represented by Vronsky’s portrait of Anna.

Tolstoy repeatedly calls attention to women’s hair, noting that Anna’s unruly locks that curl every which way were “all her own” (свои без примеси), whereas Madame Vronskaya, the grotesque “withered old lady with black eyes and ringlets,” wears false hair in a pathetic echo of her coquettish past.²¹¹ While most ladies wear fake hair, Tolstoy notes that Kitty’s fake hair feels like it is her own. She has not completely given over to the role of society woman. She is in an in-between stage, she retains her youthful innocence and emotionality.

In *War and Peace*, Hélène appeared as a Rococo Galatea, a marble statue that Pierre tried to bring to life. In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy’s “painted ladies” aspire to this ideal of cold, false beauty, and attempt to become works of art designed for public consumption. These women appear less as living, breathing beings, and more as collections of lifeless objects stuck together

²¹⁰ раскрашенной, в ленточках, кружевах и завитушках Француженке, ... ему оскорбительна была эта Француженка, вся составленная, казалось, из чужих волос, *poudre de riz* и *vinaigre de toilette*. [18:37].

²¹¹ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 58.

to suggest human form. As in his creation of H      , Tolstoy carves the shoulders, necks, arms, and busts of these women out of marble or ivory, cold and colorless materials. For instance, at the ball, Anna wears a “black, low-cut velvet dress that exposed her full, finely molded shoulders and bosom, which looked like they had been chiseled out of old ivory...around her finely molded, strong neck was a string of pearls.”²¹² He accentuates the idea of falsity in his repetition of the word chiseled (        ), which is translated later as finely molded. Societal conceptions of beauty serve as the hands of the artist creating counterfeit works of art. These society ladies begin as Galateas but strive to become statues painted and crowned with false hair. They try to become empty signifiers, imitating imitations of real women.

When she tries to play the role of a young society woman, descriptions of Kitty are similar to those of the painted ladies discussed above. For instance, at the ball when she is the center of societal attention and hoping to marry Vronsky, “Kitty’s bared shoulders and arms felt like cold marble, a feeling she especially liked.”²¹³ However, for Kitty, this sensation of marble skin is fleeting. She retains her authenticity, marrying Levin instead of becoming Vronsky’s wax doll.

Anna, on the other hand, willingly accepts this role. Mandelker discusses “Anna’s self-destructive presentation of self as art object (portrait or bust) meant to be admired and desired for its beauty alone, and calls Anna’s suicide her final self-portrait.”²¹⁴ By presenting herself as an immobile art object, Anna chooses to be completely frozen in time. Siding entirely with the spatial arts, the representation of Anna as art commodity here does not allow her to come to life

²¹² Tolstoy, *Anna*, 74.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 73.

²¹⁴ Mandelker, “Painted Lady,” 4, 9.

as she did in her portrait which saw the combination of temporal and spatial arts. Without the aid of the temporal qualities of literature Anna is forced into lifelessness as she cannot move forward. Tolstoy calls Anna's dark dress a frame (рамка),²¹⁵ and later presents her in a frame of lace (в рамке кружев)²¹⁶ at the Petersburg opera. In this second instance she appears in a frame within a frame, as the theater box calls attention to its occupants. The view from box seats are worse than from other parts of the theater, the point of box seating is to be seen, the occupants become art objects for public consumption just like the performers on stage.

The succession of different portraits illustrates the Janus face of the visual arts in Tolstoy's mind, the conflict between painting as a rich source of techniques to better communicate with the reader-viewer, and its almost demonic double—counterfeit art. It is the latter that we see Anna eventually become, art that remains an empty signifier, a painted wax doll crushed on the train tracks of a Petersburg railway station. This clash between the two sides of visual art leads up to the tension that causes Tolstoy to eventually reject his “painterly” aesthetic in favor of his later “draughtsmanly,” black-and-white style that pairs with his strict interpretation of right and wrong.

Mikhailov denounces the concept of artistic technique. Tolstoy's earlier works feature specific techniques from the visual arts such as the rule of thirds. Perhaps Tolstoy's rejection of visual art techniques spur from his identification of techniques in his work as heralds of counterfeit art. Through the discerning eye of Mikhailov, he begins to see his earlier work in a new light. The last parts of the novel following Anna's suicide resemble Tolstoy's post-

²¹⁵ Черное платье... не было видно на ней; это была только рамка, и была видна только она.” Tolstoi, *PSS*, 18:85.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 19:118.

conversion works far more than do than the first sections of the novel. It seems that when Anna throws herself under the train and this character, for whom Tolstoy previously had so much compassion, kills what is left of her natural self and becomes an empty signifier, Tolstoy severs his previous relationship with the visual arts.

IV. Didacticism in Color

The move away from canonical painting techniques in favor of a more restrictive and didactic use of the visual is reflected in the color palette of *Anna Karenina*. Tolstoy's use of color in the novel is a point of transition from the more mimesis-driven and occasionally symbolic role in works like *War and Peace* to the achromatic didacticism of post-conversion works such as *The Death of Ivan Ilych* and *Resurrection*. Tolstoy employs color in a far more strategic manner in *Anna Karenina* than in his adherence to the color norms in the verbal landscape paintings that abound in "Lucerne" and *War and Peace*. N. I. Burnasheva explains that Tolstoy's earlier works are best seen "from the point of view of an autobiography" which can be seen as simply "factually documented sketches, closer to the form of a thematic report" than as a symbolic work of prose.²¹⁷ Portraying the world as truthfully as possible, painting a vivid picture, one sentence can include the entire color spectrum. Conversely, in *Anna Karenina*, color is one of many visual devices that communicates Tolstoy's personal morality and passes comment upon the behaviors and attitudes of his characters. Fueled by the reader's physiological and psychological reactions to each hue, a strategic hierarchy of colors guides their understanding of the novel's message and provides another link between Tolstoy's visual aesthetic and his constantly adapting philosophies and realism.

²¹⁷ N. I. Burnasheva, *Rannee tvorchestvo L. N. Tolstogo: Tekst i vremia* (Moscow: MIK, 1999), 91.

Tolstoy presents the reader with characters who run an entire moral spectrum from the morally bankrupt Countesses Lydia, the chaste and maternal Kitty, to more complex characters who exist in several categories such as Anna and Levin. His associations of these characters with a specific color, or colors, signals his moral judgement of them to the reader. Characters associated with the colors white, yellow, and blue are lower on Tolstoy's moral hierarchy than those connected with colors like red and green.

As in "Lucerne," Tolstoy associates white, that is the absence of color, with the superficial, rigid, and amoral members of Westernized society. He presents these characters as the disembodied "whitest" of teeth, hands, and ties, whom he linked to the destructive nature of civilization in general by coloring them the same as he did the offensive bridge that scarred the beautiful and fluid Swiss landscape. This use of white to mark empty or even soulless characters continues in *War and Peace*. White shoulders, white hands, a white face and hands, and white ties become epithets for Helene, Napoleon, Speransky, and a myriad of society lackies. According to Gary R. Jahn, the members of high society "are clearly no more than targets for Tolstoy's invective against the moral shortcomings of a particular social entity."²¹⁸ Dolly's young daughter Tanya ruins her white dress by spilling jam all over it as she shares a piece of cake with her younger brother Grisha. In their moment of happiness and piety the children's pure souls, still immune to society norms, create community and equality in their own microcosm. The color white cannot exist in such a moment.

His use of color stands apart in its use of the psychological and physiological however it falls neatly and deliberately into his network of aesthetic meanings that so beautifully composes

²¹⁸ Jahn, Gary R. "The Image of the Railroad in *Anna Karenina*," *SEEJ* 25.2 (1981), 5.

the novel as a whole. This regimented use of color is representative of Tolstoy's restrictive aesthetic that moves further from mimesis and more to a didactic visuality that culminates in the black and white palette and sculptural play of positive and negative space that we see in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*.

V. Ekphrasis and Visual Language

Anna Karenina proves to be a point of liminality for Tolstoy not only in his aesthetic, but also in his attitudes toward the written word and the visual arts. In previous works, such as "Lucerne" and *War and Peace*, we saw Tolstoy borrow compositional elements, color, and even terminology from painting and sculpture in an attempt to create natural signs through the arbitrary sign system of language. It seemed that he trusted the visual's ability to present reality to his reader more fully than could the verbal. Tolstoy does synthesize elements from literature and visual art to portray Anna more completely than traditional literary description could alone. However, his faith in the visual appears somewhat shaken in the novel. Tolstoy now finds a single image insufficient to depict Anna in her entirety. In three separate instances of depictive ekphrasis, he presents his reader with three portraits of Anna which, when considered together, illustrate her complete character, and separately depict the various faces/roles she adopts in different situations. It is only through all of these portraits together that Anna's complete character can be properly illustrated. Here Tolstoy uses ekphrasis to deepen his realism. Where a single image or a lengthy description are incapable of showing Anna's true nature to the reader, a series of literary portraits—verbal and visual entwined in multiple ekphrastic passages—prove successful.

Tolstoy complicates the reader's interaction with each portrait by filtering them through the gaze of different characters, namely Karenin, Vronsky, Mikhailov, and Levin. This adds another layer of interpretation for the reader-viewer to consider and reminds him or her that art in any form comes colored by the biases and choices of the artist. The emphasis on the viewer's gaze and its impact on the way a work of art is interpreted draws the reader's attention to his or her own role as a consumer of art and the way in which personal biases affect this consumption.

These semi-ekphrastic depictions of society women come to full fruition in Tolstoy's presentation of Anna. The first ekphrastic moment in the novel presents the portrait of Anna that so disturbed her husband while he tried to read. As Grossman notes, this portrait is seen through the lens of Karenin's gaze. "The Petersburg portrait marks the closed door of the relations of Karenin with his wife."²¹⁹ The woman Karenin sees in the painting is his reproachful wife, who, in his eyes and in Tolstoy's, rejects the traditions of family and flouts conventions of propriety and discretion. It is interesting that this portrait was painted by a well-known society artist and that, as Grossman points out, "the likeness that he has caught of Anna may be her 'society face.'"²²⁰ Karenin's interpretation of the portrait, colored by Anna's recent maleficence. The portrait depicting her society face no longer suits her completely in light of her dismissal of family honor and embrace of sexual desire.

This new side of Anna, the role of the mistress who leaves her country and family behind to stay with her lover in an exotic locale, is captured in the portrait Vronsky paints of Anna in Italy. This Anna is shown to the reader through Vronsky's gaze. He constructs his ideal imagining of Anna out of clichés. Given Vronsky's understanding of art, he can create nothing

²¹⁹ Joan Delaney Grossman, "Tolstoy's Portrait of Anna: Keystone in the Arch," *Criticism* 18.1 (Winter 1976), 7.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

more than a type. His conception of the creative process begins with strict adherence to genre and imitation. When he is first unsure of what kind of painting he would choose, he tries to choose between established genres such as “religious, historical, genre, or realistic.”²²¹ Tolstoy notes that “more than all other styles [Vronsky] liked the French, full of grace and effect, and in that style he began painting a portrait of Anna in an Italian costume, and this portrait seemed to him and to everyone who saw it very successful.”²²² As demonstrated in his use of properties of French Rococo portraiture to critique Hélène, Vronsky’s association with the “French style” is also a form of critique.

His short-lived flirtation with painting has a performative nature. He plays the role of “an enlightened lover and patron of the arts—and he himself a modest artist who had renounced society, connections, and ambition for the woman he loved.”²²³ His pretense accentuates the falsity of his art. Tolstoy notes that, “medieval Italian life had had of late so charmed Vronsky that he even wore his hat and flung his cape over his shoulder in medieval fashion, which was very becoming to him.”²²⁴ This affinity for medieval and Renaissance painting and dress is most likely linked to Vronsky’s preferences for French art. In the early nineteenth century French painting saw a revival of medieval and Renaissance subjects in what became known as the Troubadour style. According to Todd Porterfield, the Troubadour movement began with Jacques-Louis David’s depiction of Napoleon’s coronation, a painting that “relies on sentimental anecdote, elegant costume, and a pastiche of references to earlier art.”²²⁵ Paintings of this style often dealt with sentimental anecdotes, chivalrous acts, and sexual encounters in an intimate and

²²¹ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 465.

²²² *Ibid.*, 427 [19:33].

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Todd Porterfield, *Staging Empire: Napoleon, Ingres, and David* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 141.

detailed execution. One such painting is Jean-Aguste-Dominique Ingres' 1814 *Portrait of Madame de Senonnes* (**Figure 10**).

This painting is representative of the style of painting Vronsky emulates in his portrait of Anna. Ingres uses a perfect oval for his subject's face, which gives it less volume and strips the subject of her individuality. Mme. de Senonnes' transparent collar reminds the viewer of her body and the viewer's role as voyeur. Ingres includes his signature on a visiting card tucked into the corner of the mirror, which gives the picture a more sexual tone as it implies the artist was on intimate terms with his subject. Vronsky attempts to portray Anna in a similar way, an idealized sexualized art object created to elicit pleasure in the viewer, the type of art Tolstoy would later term "counterfeit" in *What is Art?*

Vronsky, however, never finishes his troubadour-style portrait of Anna. After seeing Mikhailov's painting he no longer sees the point of completing his own, inferior work. The portrait left unfinished accentuates the fact that the woman it portrays is not a complete person, she is an ideal, a type, filtered through Vronsky's amorous gaze and, in Tolstoy's opinion, poor taste in art. Vronsky, unlike Mikhailov, is not inspired by life itself, rather, he "took his inspiration...indirectly from life already embodied in art."²²⁶ His portrait is thus a diluted natural sign, a representation of a representation and is further removed from the reality it attempts to present. Vronsky tries to create what Mikhailov describes as a wax doll, an image drained of its meaning, a surface without substance, a simulacrum of an Anna who lacks her characteristic vivacity, complexity, and individuality.

²²⁶ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 427.



Figure 10 Jean-Aguste-Dominique Ingres. *Portrait of Madame de Senonnes*. 1814. Oil on canvas. 106 X 84cm. Musée des Beaux Arts, Nantes, France.

While Vronsky is unable to complete his portrait, Anna herself, as Mandelker argues, creates a self-portrait that she completes through her suicide. In ending her own life, Anna imposes “her own aesthetic constraints on her presentation of self.”²²⁷ In her suicide she succumbs to the pressures of societal norms and expectations. This society does allow for a woman with sexual desire and disregard for traditional family structure. I argue that Anna’s suicide is the ultimate act of conformity, and thus she becomes like the society ladies who strive to resemble statues. Throughout the course of the novel Anna hardens from living woman into cold marble. Mandelker discusses Anna’s “self-destructive presentation of self as art object

²²⁷ Mandelker, “Painted Lady,” 4.

(portrait or bust) meant to be admired and desired for its beauty alone.”²²⁸ Tolstoy shows the way in which the conformity to unnatural social norms slowly snuffs out Anna’s natural beauty.

We see this process already in motion at the ball where, as discussed earlier, Anna’s “finely molded shoulders and bosom...looked like they had been chiseled out of old ivory.”²²⁹ Her ivory body juxtaposed with her unruly natural hair presents a chimera, part art object for public consumption, and part authentic and vivacious woman. Later, at the Petersburg opera the reader sees Anna again, though she is more statue than living being in this encounter. We see, now through the double lens of Vronsky’s gaze filtered through his lorgnette, “Anna’s head, proud, stunningly beautiful, and smiling in its lace frame.”²³⁰ She ceases to be a complete person, shown instead as a disembodied bust. Tolstoy forces the reader to compare this new Anna with her former self by noting that, for Vronsky, “the set of her head on her beautiful broad shoulders and the excited but checked radiance of her eyes and her entire face reminded him of her exactly as he had first seen her at the ball in Moscow.” In real life, Anna is more and more like an art object. In this second scene, Vronsky “experienced this beauty in a completely different way. There was nothing mysterious in his emotion for her now, and so her beauty, although it attracted him even more strongly than before, at the same time now offended him.”²³¹ The comparison of the two visual representations of Anna through Vronsky’s gaze is yet another example of the increasingly clear message Tolstoy communicates to his reader through his use of the visual. Becoming more like a fashionable art piece, an ivory bust that echoes Hélène’s marble countenance, Anna appears more conventionally beautiful, but Tolstoy shows through Vronsky’s

²²⁸ Ibid., 9.

²²⁹ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 74.

²³⁰ Ibid., 500.

²³¹ Ibid.

offense at this beauty, that she has become something that inspires pleasure detached from any real meaning.

The penultimate stage of her transformation occurs when Levin compares the living Anna with Mikhailov's portrait. In her meeting with Levin, Anna's face "seemed to turn to stone [как бы окаменело]. With this expression she was even more beautiful than before."²³² The more canonically beautiful Anna becomes the further she moves from Tolstoy's concept of authenticity and natural beauty. Levin notes that her "expression was new; it was outside that circle of expressions, which both beamed with and emitted happiness, that the artist had captured in the portrait."²³³ Anna destroys all semblance of her natural beauty when she actively chooses to end her life. It is in her suicide that she becomes nothing more than a beautiful surface shaped by societal convention.

The most iconic portrait of Anna captures her vivacity, natural beauty, and reflects part of her soul. According to Mandelker, the portrait by Mikhailov "widens the interpretation of Anna, portraying her at a new stage of her life and to a new, sympathetic observer." Yet, even the Mikhailov portrait, a work of art by a sincere and moral artist is, on its own, not a complete depiction of Anna as a character. Brunson argues that, "the potential for portraits to fall short, whether because of their allegorical status or overblown mannerisms, is apparent even in Tolstoy's stance toward literary portraiture, the description of individuals in prose."²³⁴ To truly understand Anna's complex nature, the reader requires all three portraits, that is, depictions of the various facets of her personality and development. The reliance on several images to portray a

²³² Ibid., 637 [19:278].

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Brunson, *Russian Realisms*, 113.

single character points to Tolstoy's fledgling doubts regarding the visual's ability to communicate reality to the reader. As Brunson points out, Tolstoy's shift toward recognizing "that a series of images, rather than only one, comes closer to embodying the particular demands of literary portraiture."²³⁵ He grapples with the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs while natural signs, single images, start to become insufficient for him as well.

VI. Dynamism of Landscapes Propelling Plot Progression

Anna Karenina marks a shift in Tolstoy's use of ekphrasis not only in the realm of portraiture and references to paintings, but also in his creation of "word paintings." As in previous works, as demonstrated in "Lucerne" and *War and Peace*, are saturated with extended descriptions, particularly of landscapes. These descriptions rely heavily on visual language including some terminology associated with landscape painting. As discussed in the previous chapters, these descriptions share many compositional elements with traditional landscape painting such as distinct color divisions and adherence to the rule of thirds, and often appear in some type of "frame" such as a window or strategically positioned vertical and horizontal elements in the "picture plane." These meticulous verbal renderings of the landscape temporarily halt the forward progression of the plot. Their focus is the representation of a static image at a single point in time. In *War and Peace*, for example, one landscape seems as if "freshly varnished"²³⁶ and another was "etched with unnatural distinctness" on a surface of "bright

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 137 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 9:167].

immobile brilliance.”²³⁷ The action of the novel temporarily stops, and the various elements within the landscapes themselves lack movement.

In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy still directs his reader’s attention to the natural world, and some scenes recall his earlier descriptive style. The “new special gleam” mentioned in the passage below creates an effect akin to the “freshly varnished” quality of the landscape in *War and Peace*. Yet Tolstoy does not linger on these descriptions as he did in previous works. They are shorter, more direct, and flow quickly back into the action of the novel. As Grossman argues, in the novel “each image and action evokes the next and sometimes a whole chain.”²³⁸ We can see this forward movement in the following landscape description:

The huge expanse of the meadow had been mown and gleamed with a special, new gleam, its rows now fragrant, in the slanted evening rays of the sun. The bushes cut down by the river, and the river itself, which had not been visible before but now gleamed like steel in its bends, and the moving and rising people, the steep wall of grass where the meadow had been mown, and the hawks circling over the bared meadow.²³⁹

Tolstoy lays the scene on the immobile background of the gleaming meadow. The inclusion of diagonal lines, the slanted rays of the sun, introduces movement to the picture in a manner which vertical and horizontal elements do not. These lines guide the reader-viewer’s eye down to the river, which through its curves and shining surface, brings life and forward movement to the landscape. The dynamism of the scene culminates in the addition of “moving and rising people” and the hawks circling overhead. The scene is not contained by any “frame,” such as a window, and its scope is not contained by strong vertical elements as seen in earlier landscape descriptions. Instead, Tolstoy gives the sense that the scene expands beyond the vignette he provides.

²³⁷ Ibid., 1009–1010 [12:93].

²³⁸ Grossman, “Tolstoy’s Portrait,” 14.

²³⁹ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 234 [18:268–269].

Many of these in-depth descriptions not only fail to hinder the progression of plot but rather seem to propel it forward with elements dynamism and movement. The following passage focuses on the changes taking place in nature with the arrival of spring. Unlike the passage above, the following description features verbs of motion that force the reader to move forward in time with the fog, icy water, and wind.

On Thursday the wind died down and a thick gray fog moved in, as if to hide the secrets of the changes that had taken place in nature. Water began to flow in the fog, the sheets of ice cracked and began to drift, the cloudy foamy streams moved faster and faster...in the evening, the fog broke, the clouds scattered like lambs, it cleared up, and real spring was revealed...the old grass was turning green and sending out new shoots, buds had swelled on the guelder rose and currants, the sticky birches were swollen with sap, and a circling bee hummed on the willow sprinkled with gold flowers.²⁴⁰

Verbs like move (надвинуться), flow (политься), drift (сдвинуться), and scatter (разбегаться), previously foreign to his extended nature descriptions, shatter the stillness of the scene giving it an almost cinematic quality.²⁴¹ The word swollen (надуться) brings these objects to the brink of movement. Swollen buds appear about to burst open into blooming flowers, and the sap in swollen birches is poised to gush out of the trees at any moment. Instead of “immobile brilliance” landscapes in *Anna Karenina* contain so much movement and potential movement that they propel the reader forward almost making him or her read more quickly to keep up with the changing scenery of the novel.

The shift away from immobile landscapes to scenes that push the reader forward in the progression of time is also demonstrative of Tolstoy’s move from his plotless novel, *War and Peace*, to one whose entire architecture is based on plot. As Eikhenbaum notes, earlier in his life

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 141 [18:161].

²⁴¹ While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss Tolstoy and cinema, it is important to note that some scholars such as Thomas Seifrid have discussed cinematic techniques in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Perhaps the adoption of movement in previously static landscape descriptions is linked to Tolstoy’s growing fascination with film.

Tolstoy, “fascinated by the representation of ‘the dialectics of the soul’ and denying the significance of plot... found ‘the stories of Pushkin somehow bare... the interest of the details of feeling replaces the interest of the events themselves.” This preference for description and detail over plot is especially prevalent in “Lucerne” and is also a major aesthetic trait of *War and Peace*. In the 1870s, when Tolstoy began *Anna Karenina*, “he obviously moves away from psychological details and turns to events.”²⁴² Tolstoy himself describes his new appreciation for plot when he writes that he admires how “‘Pushkin gets right to the point. Another would have begun to describe the guests, the rooms, but he leads into the action straight away.’” It is in fact on that same day that he began to write *Anna Karenina*.²⁴³

Despite this admiration for Pushkin’s immediate jump into the action of his tales, Tolstoy still slows the progression of time in his choice to divide the novel along two separate plotlines that center on two separate protagonists. The continuous switching from the Anna-Vronsky story to the Kitty-Levin narrative, often at integral moments in the plot development, creates suspense which drives the reader onward in the narrative, while also delaying the satisfaction of his or her curiosity by introducing elements of the second storyline. The dual plotline is far more contained than the multiple storylines that merge into the plotlessness of *War and Peace*.

In comparing *War and Peace* with *Anna Karenina*, we can see Tolstoy’s transition from flowing, plotless works to ones that are more well-structured, sculptural and architectural. While *War and Peace* featured a series of independently-meaningful, self-contained moments throughout the text, Tolstoy constructs “labyrinth of linkages” between plot events in *Anna Karenina*. Liza Knapp calls *Anna Karenina* a “multiplot” novel, the type that “create a special

²⁴² Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoy in the Seventies*, 127.

²⁴³ Ibid., 128.

kind of desire in their readers: the desire to understand how the plots relate to each other.”²⁴⁴

Tolstoy’s earlier works are not as tightly constructed. Some plot lines in *War and Peace* cross or merge but they never have the meticulous structure seen in *Anna Karenina*, the structure of which Eikhenbaum describes as “without any intricate compositional device: the novel is constructed on the quite open and simple parallelism of two lines...The novel is not supported by the adhesion of events in themselves, but by the adhesion of themes and images and by the unity of attitude toward them.”²⁴⁵

Tolstoy discusses the importance of *Anna Karenina*’s architecture in a letter to Rachinsky in 1878. He writes, “I am proud of the architecture. The arches of the vault are brought together in such a way that it is even impossible to notice where the keystone is. And that is what I was trying to achieve more than anything else. The links in the structure are not in the plot and not in the relationship (acquaintance) of the characters, but in the inner linkage.”²⁴⁶ Tolstoy focuses far more on structure in *Anna Karenina* than in previous works, and it is in this tight composition that we see the beginnings of a more restrictive and organized aesthetic. One feature of this aesthetic is the inclusion of binary oppositions, not only in the division of the plot, such as the play between positive and negative space, what I term verbal *contrapposto* and will discuss in the next chapter. It is this pared-down, more iconic, linear aesthetic that we will see in works like *The Death of Ivan Ilych* and that culminates in *Resurrection*.

²⁴⁴ Knapp, *Anna*, 5.

²⁴⁵ Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoi in the Seventies*, 111.

²⁴⁶ Tolstoi, *PSS*, 62:376.

As Thomas Seifrid notes, *Anna Karenina* is, “of all Tolstoy’s works perhaps the most involved with problems of vision.”²⁴⁷ These problems of vision are tightly bound to Tolstoy’s understanding of art and aesthetics, and his own manner of communicating reality to his reader. It is through the visual and discussions of the visual that Tolstoy comments on the successes and failures of different media to immerse the reader or viewer in the reality of the work. Through his characters, he demonstrates a strong distrust of language as a vehicle for truth, often showing words to be empty signifiers no longer bound to their signified. In his continued struggle to create natural signs by means of the arbitrary sign system of the written word, Tolstoy creates a unique visual aesthetic in *Anna Karenina*, one that exists between word and image.

Tolstoy’s attempt to create a new medium, a profoundly visual version of a verbal art culminates in *Anna Karenina*, which becomes a major aesthetic turning point in his *oeuvre*. Tolstoy’s negotiation of media is particularly apparent in Levin’s discussion with Pestsov about Wagner, when Levin argues against porous boundaries between the arts. Levin’s or Pestsov’s opinion cannot simply be taken as that of Tolstoy himself. The conversation between the two men seems an echo of Tolstoy’s internal musings on the relationship between the arts, the extent to which they can and should merge, and if the results are always successful. Pestsov comments on the opera the two men are attending, saying that it is ““particularly graphic and sculptural, so to speak, and rich in colors where you feel the approach of Cordelia.”²⁴⁸ Here Levin’s acquaintance speaks of the cross pollination of the arts in a positive sense. The synesthetic interpretation of music in color recalls Natasha’s comparison of Pierre and Boris through shape and color in *War and Peace*. Words fail her in her ability to make her mother understand the two

²⁴⁷ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 444.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 624.

men's opposing essences. She instead turns to the visual in a very abstract sense, calling Pierre "dark blue and red" and Boris "narrow and light gray." Pestsov advocates for such borrowing of terms between the arts, arguing that art is "one and that it could achieve its loftiest manifestations only by merging all art forms." His assertion is strengthened by the fact that, as he explains to Levin, it is impossible to follow the opera without also reading the program. In this moment we see that neither the visual nor the verbal arts are adequate alone to fully engage its audience.

Pestsov also condemns the opera "for its excessive, saccharine, affected simplicity... comparing it with the simplicity of the Pre-Raphaelites in painting."²⁴⁹ The Pre-Raphaelite movement in art began in 1848 in England by a group of artists dedicated to "fidelity to nature...through detailed, rather literal-minded observation of flora, etc., and the use of clear, bright, sharp-focus technique."²⁵⁰ These artists abhorred the academic style of painting of the time that featured many genre paintings. It seems from Pestsov's discussion of "saccharine, affected simplicity," however, that Tolstoy is referring to a later incarnation of the movement, the "second wave of pseudo-medieval Pre-Raphaelitism" that featured decorative pictures of Romantic scenes tinged with "a kind of escapism."²⁵¹

From the other side, Tolstoy speaks through Levin who insists that "the mistake of Wagner and all his followers lay in the fact that the music was trying to move into an alien art form, just as poetry errs when it describes the features of faces, which is what painting is supposed to do."²⁵² Levin's argument recalls Lessing's discussion of Laocoön. Just as Lessing criticizes the attempt of a Greek sculptor to capture the poetic anguish of Laocoön in marble, so

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ian Chilvers ed., "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood," *Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 563.

²⁵¹ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 624.

²⁵² Ibid., 624.

too does Levin, as an example of Wagner's mistake, cite "the sculptor who took it into his head to carve out of marble the shades of poetic images rising around a poet on a pedestal. 'The sculptor's shades had so little of the shade about them that they were positively holding onto the ladder.'"²⁵³ This turn of phrase, though pleasing to him, strikes Levin as uncomfortably familiar. "He couldn't remember whether he had spoken this very phrase before and specifically to Pestsov, and once he said it, he became embarrassed."²⁵⁴ Tolstoy shakes the foundations of Levin's argument ever so slightly in noting that these words may not have been his own.

Tolstoy's struggle between a truthful presentation of reality and a retention of strong interart boundaries manifests in both sides of Levin's conversation with Pestsov and shows *Anna Karenina* as demonstrative of Tolstoy's negotiation and compromise between the verbal and visual arts. Already we find Tolstoy turning away from his earlier works, calling *War and Peace* "verbose nonsense," and even deeming *Anna Karenina* "unbearably repulsive,"²⁵⁵ while simultaneously using the very devices he speaks out against.

Tolstoy aspires to be more like the artist Mikhailov than like Wagner. Mikhailov expresses a strong distaste for artistic technique and represents authentic art by means of a spontaneous and simple process. In his attempt to be like Mikhailov, Tolstoy eventually rejects his earlier works full of "technique" in favor of a more minimal aesthetic with less reliance on device and greater emphasis on the communication of a moral message to the reader. As early as 1872 Tolstoy's affinity for simple and clear prose devoid of superfluous device and affect becomes apparent. Just before starting work on *Anna Karenina*, he expresses to Strakhov the

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Tolstoy's discussion of *War and Peace* is from a letter to A. Fet in 1871 in which he vows to never write as he did in *War and Peace* ever again. The reference to *Anna Karenina* appears in a letter to N. Strakhov in 1875. English translations are from Christian, *Tolstoy's Letters Volume I*, 231;282.

aesthetic virtues of his *Primer*, one of his didactic works. He writes, “if there is any merit in the *Primer* articles, it will lie in the simplicity and clarity of stroke and line, i.e. of the language; and in a journal this would be strange and disagreeable—as if it were something unfinished. Rather like pencil drawings without any shading in some picture gallery.”²⁵⁶ Again he compares his prose to works of visual art and shows growing preference for the draughtsmanly and sculptural aesthetic that abounds in his later works, particularly *The Death of Ivan Ilych*.

²⁵⁶ Christian, *Tolstoy's Letters Volume I*, 282.

CHAPTER FOUR

From Painter to Priest: Tolstoy's *Confession* and *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

All the variety, all the charm, all the beauty of life is composed of light and shadow.

Всё разнообразие, вся прелесть, вся красота жизни складывается из тени и света.

Lev Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (1873–1877)²⁵⁷

In his earlier career, and even while writing his masterpiece *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy often expresses feelings of kinship with visual artists, painters in particular. In “A Few Words Apropos of the Book *War and Peace*,” Tolstoy contrasts historians and painters in their approach to representation, and wholeheartedly places himself and his art on the side of the painters. In a letter to Strakhov in 1873 about *Anna Karenina* he writes, “as a painter (живописец) needs light for the finishing touches, so I need inner light.”²⁵⁸ Throughout his *oeuvre* Tolstoy's art changes, but it is not until *Confession* (1879) that the metaphors by which he depicts the writer change as well. In *Confession*, Tolstoy refers to himself and his fellow writers not as artists or those who paint with words, but rather as priests of a kind of literary religion. He writes, “this faith in the meaning of poetry and in this evolution of life was a religion and I was one of its priests, and for a considerable length of time I lived in this faith without ever doubting its validity.”²⁵⁹ The shift in Tolstoy, which we might describe as one from painter to priest, reflects the growing importance of a work's moral message as well as a new emphasis on its clear, concise and accessible presentation to the reader.

Tolstoyan seekers, characters who undergo serial conversions and wade through the ambiguities and doubts of life, fade from prominence in Tolstoy's work and are replaced instead

²⁵⁷ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 41 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 18:46].

²⁵⁸ Tolstoi, *PSS*, 62: 49. Translation from Christian, *Letters*, 265.

²⁵⁹ Tolstoy, *Confession*, 23.

by those who experience increasingly singular epiphanies, occurring in the context of the author's narrowing philosophy and morality. It is in the multiplicity of views within his writer's "religion" that the seeds of Tolstoy's doubts first germinate. He explains in *Confession* that, "the first point of doubt was that I had begun to notice how the priests of this religion disagreed among themselves...they argued, quarreled, deceived and tricked one another...all this forced me to doubt the truth of the faith."²⁶⁰ The complex multitude of philosophies, dogmas, and potential paths greatly disturbed Tolstoy, aspiring hedgehog that he was.²⁶¹

Tolstoy's focus becomes then less the accurate, and immersively detailed representation of reality, and more the communication of his moral message to the reader in clear, unadorned prose. Part of this simplification stemmed from the ardent desire to make his work accessible to the masses. He uses simple language and incorporates colloquialisms and folk expressions in his post-conversion prose. Rosamund Bartlett explains that in 1878, Tolstoy spent the summer in Samara, where "conversations about religion with the Molokans were the highlight of Tolstoy's stay." The views of these sectarians may have affected Tolstoy's approach to aesthetics. They "dispensed not only with all rituals...but also with clergy, sacred buildings and artefacts such as icons, engaging instead in independent Bible study."²⁶² Bartlett connects the change in style with Tolstoy's moral agenda. Describing Tolstoy's work on the short story "What Men Live By" (1879), Bartlett notes that "writing morally engaged fiction in a clear and simple style was one way Tolstoy planned to propagate his Christian ideals."²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ This is in reference to Isaiah Berlin's seminal essay on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky titled, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*.

²⁶² Rosamund Bartlett, *Tolstoy: A Russian Life*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 272–273.

²⁶³ Ibid., 293.

This chapter examines the aesthetics of *Confession* (1879) and *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (1886) and connects this new style with Tolstoy's moral, philosophical, and spiritual beliefs at the time. Although *Ivan Ilych* is a fictional work and *Confession* is not, it is important to look at the two together, in part due to their status as the first major works published after Tolstoy's conversion, and also because of their similarities in style and content. *Ivan Ilych*, according to Matual, "is thematically and even stylistically a fictional recasting of *The Confession*...the parallels are not always exact, but they are sufficiently numerous and close to suggest an organic link between the two works."²⁶⁴ Coupling fiction and nonfiction is not new for Tolstoy. The marriage of the two appears early on, for example in the vacillation between novel and historical essay in *War and Peace*, or the mixture of fiction and autobiography in *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, *Youth*. The similarities between *Confession* and *Ivan Ilych* reveal not only the noticeable shifts in Tolstoy's post-conversion stylistics, but also the increasingly-porous boundaries for the author between nonfiction tracts and works of literary art.

As Donna Orwin points out, in *Confession* "what is important for understanding Tolstoy's poetics and the relation between his life and his works is how stylized the narrative is, and how, rather than recounting Tolstoy's life as it actually occurred, it serves his present purposes."²⁶⁵ Indeed much has been written in both English and Russian about the religious content of *Confession* however, most of the scholarly focus has been on the message rather than the aesthetic behind it. Matual explains, "while acknowledging the importance and even the beauty of *Confession*, critics have generally failed to deal meaningfully with its purely artistic features."²⁶⁶ In my examination, I focus on the artistic devices present in the text, showing how

²⁶⁴ David Matual, "'The Confession' as Subtext in *The Death of Ivan Ilich*" *International Fiction Review* 8.2 (1981): 124.

²⁶⁵ Donna Tussing Orwin, *Simply Tolstoy*, (New York: Simply Charly, 2017), 74.

²⁶⁶ Matual, "Poetics," 276.

visual techniques, such as contrast, color imagery, representations of space, and ekphrasis, reflect the philosophical content of the work. I also place *Confession* and *The Death of Ivan Ilych* in the larger context of the arc of Tolstoy's visual aesthetic as works that bridge *Anna Karenina* and *Resurrection*, in terms of the visual aesthetic of the author's realism.

On the aesthetic spectrum that starts with the "painterly" "Lucerne" of 1857, *Ivan Ilych* and *Confession* represent the beginning stages of the "draughtsmanly" style that characterizes later works like *Resurrection* (1899). This later style includes a heightened use of contrast, the play between positive and negative space, almost exclusive use of black and white imagery, and the increased linearity of narrative progression. The style of *Resurrection* reflects Tolstoy's static philosophical and moral approach to the world and the didactic aims fueling his fiction. *Ivan Ilych* and *Confession* are the first steps on the road to this aesthetic and point of view. These works demonstrate how Tolstoy moves toward a simpler visual aesthetic to make his moral message clearer; he moves away from the "colorful" aesthetic of *Anna Karenina*, which was in turn, a step away from the extended, powerful visual descriptions of *War and Peace*. Though rife with black and white imagery, *Ivan Ilych* and *Confession* remain exemplary of a gray area for Tolstoy, whose message at this point still contains some ambiguity. Characters are not exclusively negative or positive just as they are not the confused seekers of early Tolstoy. The distinctions between "good" and "bad" characters are clearer in *Ivan Ilych*, but not all encompassing. Certain images in the two works carry obvious symbolism, while others enjoy a multitude of possible interpretations.

Tolstoy's conversion was an explosive event in the writer's life, and resulted in several major changes in his worldview and approach to art. I treat his first two works as art created while the dust settled after this upheaval. Regarding this period, Bartlett explains, "there was a

journey to be undertaken before Tolstoy reached the point of formulating and articulating his new ideas...and it began with a period of intense religious searching, as reflected in the chapters at the end of *Anna Karenina*.”²⁶⁷ Many stylistic elements are noticeably different from those in *Anna Karenina*, while other changes are less apparent, still hidden amongst mental and emotional debris. It is in the aftermath of internal upheaval that Tolstoy is still in the process of parsing out the aesthetic at which he will eventually arrive in the creation of *Resurrection*. In my discussion of the different aspects of this aesthetic, I will also show how they reflect the shifts in Tolstoy’s philosophical, moral, and religious thought and their relationship to the nature of his realism.

I. Confession

In *Confession*, Tolstoy discusses his search for answers and how he found, “according to their relation to this question, all branches of human knowledge are divided, almost into two opposite hemispheres, at the opposite ends of which are two poles: one positive and one negative: yet at neither pole were there any answers to the question of life.”²⁶⁸ He designates these two poles as experimental knowledge and speculative philosophy, later described in terms of mathematics and metaphysics. He describes his life in a series of oppositions, listing “the play of light and shade, the comic, the tragic, the touching, the beautiful, and the frightening aspects of life.”²⁶⁹ Tolstoy is caught in a point of transition, pulled to see everything in terms of binaries, and yet he remains unable to fully commit to such a worldview at this moment in time.

²⁶⁷ Bartlett, *Tolstoy*, 252.

²⁶⁸ Tolstoy, *Confession*, 35.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

The moral standpoint of his later works, what Kokobobo calls “the monochromatic ideological messages of a later work like *Resurrection*,”²⁷⁰ arises from this state of mind and is reflected in his art by his inclusion of black and white colors, striking opposition and contrast, and the general starkness of his aesthetic. The imagery used in *Confession* is almost exclusively based in contrast and binaries, reflecting Tolstoy’s greater awareness of death as it exists in contrast to life, age with youth, debauchery with asceticism, and morality with sin. Yet these oppositions are not as cut and dry as they first appear, which I argue demonstrates Tolstoy’s continued search for a clearer and unchallengeable understanding of life and religion.

Unlike Nekhliudov in *Resurrection*, who quickly realizes the correct way to live and adopts a rigid internal code of ethics, the narrative voice of Tolstoy in *Confession* describes the mental *process* through which he reaches such moral surety. Though he does so in quite a different manner from his earlier work, Tolstoy still communicates his worldview to the reader with an array of visual parables. The focus here remains on the process of epiphany rather than the result, which comes to occupy the heart of *Resurrection*. If together *Confession* and *The Death of Ivan Ilych* are the bridge that spans the stylistic and philosophical gap between *Anna Karenina* and *Resurrection*, *Confession* on its own is representative of Tolstoy taking pause midway through crossing to the other side. The work contains many aspects of the later style, such as numerous contrasts and stark description, while the vestiges of the old style, including ekphrastic passages, have not yet fallen away entirely.

Many of the visual contrasts in *Confession* are spatial in nature. The work oscillates between tight, constricting spaces and the more traditional natural spaces of early Tolstoy. Yet most of the depictions of space in the work are liminal, and often cause the reader to find him or

²⁷⁰ Kokobobo, *Grotesque Realism*, 66.

herself within a spatial vacuum. This representation of in-between spaces accentuates Tolstoy's struggle with an internal transition. This lack of space can also be seen as the environment in which Tolstoy begins to parse out his new aesthetic. His narrative voice does not marvel at the open spaces of the natural world like in "Lucerne," *War and Peace*, and *Anna Karenina*. As he states in a letter to Fet in 1871, "I've stopped writing, and will never again write verbose nonsense like *War and Peace*. I'm guilty, but I swear I'll never do it again."²⁷¹ Yet neither does he describe the claustrophobic atmosphere of indoor settings as in *Ivan Ilych* and *Resurrection*. The reader finds him between the two, poised on the edge, barred from turning back and unable to move forward.

Tolstoy's depiction of time and space in his work shifts throughout his career. Earlier works feature a focus on space, which to return to Lessing, is a characteristic of the visual arts. In later years, Tolstoy creates a new type of spatiality, one that forces the reader to become aware of the forward progression of time. The move toward a more temporal art begins in *Anna Karenina*, in which descriptions, though still detailed in nature, do not detain the reader in one time and place in the novel for as long as they did in *War and Peace*. The inclusion of several verbs in descriptions propels the reader forward. In *Confession*, the image of being trapped within a liminal space amplifies the reader's knowledge of time's linear progression because Tolstoy explains how he feels stuck and simultaneously pulled forward. He creates here a chimera of medium by using the spatial properties of the visual arts to accentuate the temporality of the verbal.

Instead of halting the reader in space and interrupting the flow of plot and time like in *War and Peace*, Tolstoy dissolves time and space completely. The most interesting example of

²⁷¹ Christian, *Letters Volume I*, 231.

spacelessness occurs in the final chapter which ends with a discussion of a dream Tolstoy had in 1882, years after he began writing *Confession*. The dream was supposedly “inspired directly by the ‘thoughts and feelings’ experienced during the writing of *Confession* proper.”²⁷²

I see that I am lying on a bed. I am neither comfortable, nor uncomfortable. I am lying on my back...looking at my bed I see that I am lying on some plaited rope supports that are attached to the sides of the bed...the whole lower part of my body is slipping and hanging down, and my feet do not reach the ground. I am only supported on the upper half of my back and I start to feel not just uncomfortable but terrified of something... I am at a height such as I could never have imagined. I cannot even discern whether I can see anything there below, in the bottomless abyss over which I am hanging and into which I am being drawn... Above me there is also an abyss. I look into this abyss of sky and try to forget about the abyss below...the infinity below repels and frightens me; the infinity above attracts and reassures me...I see that I am no longer dangling or falling but am firmly supported...and see that beneath me, under the middle of my body, there is a single support and when I look up I am lying on it in a position of secure balance, and that it alone gave me support before...It appears that there is a pillar at my head and the solidity of this slender pillar is beyond doubt, although there is nothing for it to stand on. A rope is hanging very ingeniously, yet simply, from the pillar, and if one lies with the middle of one's body on the rope and looks up there can be no question of falling. This was all clear to me and I was glad and tranquil.

Вижу я, что лежу на постели. И мне ни хорошо, ни дурно, я лежу на спине...наблюдая свою постель, я вижу, что лежу на плетеных веревочных помочах, прикрепленных к бочинам кровати...весь низ моего тела спускается и висит, ноги не достают до земли. Я держусь только верхом спины, и мне становится не только неловко, но отчего-то жутко... я на высоте, подобной высоте высочайшей башни или горы, а я на такой высоте, какую я не мог никогда вообразить себе. Я не могу даже разобрать — вижу ли я что-нибудь там, внизу, в той бездонной пропасти, над которой я вишу и куда меня тянет. Вверху тоже бездна. Я смотрю в эту бездну неба и стараюсь забыть о бездне внизу, и, действительно, я забываю. Бесконечность внизу отталкивает и ужасает меня; бесконечность вверху притягивает и утверждает меня. И вижу, что я уж не вишу и не падаю, а держусь крепко... вижу, что подо мной, под серединой моего тела, одна помоча, и что, глядя вверх, я лежу на ней в самом устойчивом равновесии, что она одна и держала прежде... Оказывается, что в головах у меня стоит столб, и твердость этого столба не подлежит никакому сомнению, несмотря на то, что стоять этому тонкому столбу не на чем. Потом от столба проведена петля как-то очень хитро и вместе просто, и если лежишь на этой петле серединой тела и смотришь вверх, то даже и вопроса не может быть о падении. Всё это мне было ясно, и я был рад и спокоен.²⁷³

He describes himself as both physically and mentally divided in this scene. The upper half of his body, where the head and heart reside, is firmly supported. The lower half includes the stomach, a symbol of gluttony, and the genitals, representative of lust. These are the two vices that most plagued Tolstoy throughout his life. He depicts himself at a moment of choice; he can let himself

²⁷² Matual, “Poetics,” 284.

²⁷³ Tolstoy, *Confession*, 78–80 [Tolstoi, *PSS*, 23:57–59].

slip toward to abyss below, led by bodily desires, or lose himself in the vault above him. The abyss of the sky, which reassures him, of course symbolizes his faith. When he allows the sky above to envelop his complete attention he forgets about the abyss below and finds that his entire body is now supported in the middle in a position of perfect balance. The pillar he describes at his head, whose solidity is beyond doubt, is the unshakeable faith he had always sought.

It is as if Tolstoy creates a blank canvas for himself in his depiction of himself outside of time and space. Ilya Kliger and Nasser Zakariya argue that such “unsociable (or socially liminal) places... [are] the only ones where any degree of authenticity can be reached.”²⁷⁴ Tolstoy writes that “it became apparent to me to say that in the infinity of time and space everything is developing, becoming more perfect, complex and differentiated, is really to say nothing at all. They are all words without a meaning, for in the infinite there is no simple and complex, no before and after, and no better or worse.”²⁷⁵ He is highly aware of the potential to create a new type of art, having rejected the aesthetic worlds of his earlier works. The reader can enter Tolstoy’s mind here and in picturing an unsettling image of a man suspended in time and space, can more clearly understand the author’s internal moral and aesthetic struggle that occurred after his conversion. He sees the path he must take and his work after *Confession* are increasingly representative of his moral and aesthetic shift. It is important to remember that this section was written years after he first began writing *Confession*.

Comparing this image to ones that come earlier in the work shows a continued evolution of his aesthetic. In this later tableau he relies less on traditional images and instead creates a narrative world devoid of color, spatial depth, or time. He presents the same concepts in earlier

²⁷⁴ Ilya Kliger and Nasser Zakariya make a similar argument in their article “Poetics of Brotherhood: Organic and Mechanistic Narrative in Late Tolstoi,” *Slavic Review* 70.4 (Winter 2011), 766.

²⁷⁵ Tolstoy, *Confession*, 36.

descriptions, however he does so through more tangible images. In one instance Tolstoy compares himself to a man in a boat, oars in hand, trying to reach an unfamiliar shore. He writes. “The direction to the opposite shore was shown to me, oars were put into my inexperienced hands, and I was left alone. I rowed as best I could and moved forwards, but the further I rowed towards the centre of the stream, the faster the current became that was carrying me directly away from my object.”²⁷⁶ Instead of leaving the reader to discern the meaning of these images, he explains that “the shore was God, the direction was tradition, and the oars were the freedom given to me to row towards the shore and unite with God.”²⁷⁷

In a similar manner, he compares his quest to the meaning of life to a man lost in the woods. He writes, “I came to a clearing, climbed a tree and saw clearly into the never-ending distance. But there was no house there, nor could there be. I walked into the thicket, into the gloom and saw the darkness, but there was no house there either.”²⁷⁸ The infinite distance is similar to the abyss of the sky. The difference here is that earlier on he is searching for a concrete goal represented by the house which is just like the shore toward which the man in the boat is rowing. He still needs some proof of God here, some tangible image which symbolizes the Creator, be it a house in the woods or a distant shore. In the later description he relies only on faith, seeing nothing in the vault above him but still feeling reassured and supported by it.

One of the scenes most defined by its inclusion of opposition appears early on in *Confession* and is one of the more complex images in the work. Tolstoy retells “an old Eastern fable”²⁷⁹ in which a man tries to escape the attacks of a wild animal by jumping into an empty

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 66.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 39.

²⁷⁹ The original story is called “Vidura’s ‘Way of Understanding.’” It comes from *The Stri Parva (The Book of the Women)*, which is the eleventh book in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. Tolstoy changes the tale slightly, placing a dragon at the bottom of the well instead of a snake, and omitting the frightening bees in the bush who had produced the honey.

well. However, in the bottom of the well he encounters the wide-open jaws of a dragon prepared to eat him. Daniel Rancour-Laferriere calls this “Tolstoy’s graphic image of depression.”²⁸⁰

The poor fellow does not dare climb out because he is afraid of being eaten by the rapacious beast, neither does he dare drop to the bottom of the well for fear of being eaten by the dragon. So he seizes hold of a branch of a bush that is growing in the crevices of the well and clings on to it. His arms grow weak and he knows that he will soon have to resign himself to the death that awaits him on either side. Yet he still clings on, and while he is holding on to the branch he looks around and sees that two mice, one black and one white, are steadily working their way round the bush he is hanging from, gnawing away at it. Sooner or later the they will eat through it and the branch will snap, and he will fall into the jaws of the dragon. The traveler sees this and knows that he will inevitably perish. But while he is still hanging there he sees some drops of honey on the leaves of the bush, stretches out his tongue and licks them.

Несчастный, не смея вылезть, чтобы не погибнуть от разъяренного зверя, не смея и спрыгнуть на дно колодца, чтобы не быть пожранным драконом, ухватывается за ветви растущего в расщелинах колодца дикого куста и держится на нем. Руки его ослабевают, и он чувствует, что скоро должен будет отдаться погибели, с обеих сторон ждущей его; но он всё держится, и пока он держится, он оглядывается и видит, что две мыши, одна черная, другая белая, равномерно обходя стволину куста, на котором он висит, подтачивают ее. Вот-вот сам собой обломится и оборвется куст, и он упадет в пасть дракону. Путник видит это и знает, что он неминуемо погибнет; но пока он висит, он ищет вокруг себя и находит на листьях куста капли меда, достает их языком и лижет их.²⁸¹

The reader can easily picture this man frozen in anticipation, struggling to keep hold of the branch while, at the same time, trying to literally imbibe the last drops of sweetness from his life before he dies. Immediately, Tolstoy relates the image to his overarching message: “In the same way I am clinging to the tree of life, knowing full well that the dragon of death inevitably awaits me...I try licking the honey that once consoled me, but it no longer gives me pleasure. The white mouse and the black mouse—day and night—are gnawing at the branch... I can see the dragon clearly and the honey no longer tastes sweet.”²⁸² Tolstoy relates the tale in a style almost devoid of description. He mentions only those details that are imperative to understand the story’s meaning, for example, the colors of the two mice gnawing at the branch.

²⁸⁰ Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy’s Quest for God*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 454.

²⁸¹ Tolstoy, *Confession*, 32 [Tolstoi, *PSS* 23:13–14].

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 32.

Yet, this passage demonstrates how *Confession* is more complex visually than *Resurrection* and even *Ivan Ilych*. I argue that this last parable, the most visually descriptive in the work despite its starkness of detail, is an instance of ekphrasis in which Tolstoy, instead of trying to bypass the arbitrary sign system of language in favor of the pictorial system of natural visual signs, he combines them. Words are no longer insufficient for communication, but rather a medium accentuated by and not replaced by the visual. This scene is an instance of “associative ekphrasis,” which Robillard defines as literary passages that refer to ideas and/or structural, thematic, and theoretical conventions associated with the visual arts.²⁸³

This passage shares many aesthetic qualities with a Russian peasant woodblock print (лубок). The *lubok* is a form of popular (народное) art that consists of a single picture or a series of pictures accompanied by a short text, often a proverb (see **Figure 11** and **Figure 12**). Dating back to the seventeenth century, these prints began as woodcuts though as time went on they were also made as etchings and lithographs. These images are simple and clear with a singular moral message derived from folk beliefs or the Bible. The *lubok* is a synthesis of the visual and the verbal, a trait characteristic of Tolstoy’s late fiction. Jahn identifies the *lubok* as a “familiar model used by Tolstoj” in the writing of his popular tales (народные рассказы). In fact, he explains that, many of Tolstoy’s shorter stories from the collection “were modelled on the лубок and printed, often as separate sheets, with an accompanying picture.”²⁸⁴ The image of the man hanging over the well in *Confession* is a precursor to the *lubok*-inspired stories that Jahn discusses.

Tolstoy’s creation of a verbal *lubok* is also a visual representation of his new moral code. He abandons descriptions of characters like Maria Bolkonskya, whose luminous eyes recall

²⁸³ See Robillard, “In Pursuit of Ekphrasis.”

²⁸⁴ Gary R. Jahn, “L. N. Tolstoj’s ‘Narodnye rasskazy,’” *Russian Language Journal* 31.109 (Spring 1977): 74.

Orthodox icons, and with them turns away from the traditions and ritual of the church. Instead he is in favor of simple, clear images from folklore. He, like many of his sectarian acquaintances, advocated for individual interpretations of the Bible, which Tolstoy combined in his personal code of ethics with ideas from traditional folk wisdom. In a letter to Strakhov in March 1872, Tolstoy explains his preference for the simple language of the people over the Russian literary language and its relation to morality. He writes, “I’ve changed my writing methods and my language...because even Pushkin seems funny to me, not to mention our own lucubrations; while the language which the people speak and which has sounds to express everything a poet might want to say, is dear to me.” He values, above all, the simple and concise, unpretentious nature of the peasant language. “This language moreover—and this is the main thing—is the best poetry regulator. If you try to say anything superfluous, bombastic or morbid the language won’t permit it; but our literary language is spineless; so spoilt that whatever nonsense you write looks like literature...I simply love what is definite, clear, beautiful and unpretentious.”²⁸⁵

In addition to his short popular takes, Tolstoy also worked on his ABC primer at this time. In a letter to Strakhov in 1872, Tolstoy writes that “if there is any merit in the *Primer* articles, it will lie in the simplicity and clarity of stroke and line, i.e. of the language; and in a journal this would be strange and disagreeable—as if it were something unfinished. Rather like pencil drawings without any shading in some picture gallery.”²⁸⁶ Tolstoy himself compares his later use of language as “draughtsmanly,” that is, like a simple line drawing without shading or color. Most of the narratives that accompany *lubki*, like the narratives in Tolstoy’s short tales, feature third-person narration and the chronological presentation of events. Tolstoy’s retelling of the Eastern fable in *Confession* parallels these structural elements in the use of simple language,

²⁸⁵ Christian, *Letters Volume I*, 244.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 242.

third-person narration, communication of a clear singular message, and finally in its concise linear presentation of the plot.



Figure 11



Figure 12

Hyper-aware of the forward progression of time throughout *Confession*, Tolstoy explains how “it was impossible to stop, and impossible to turn back or close my eyes in order not to see that there was nothing ahead.”²⁸⁷ Tolstoy’s representation of time and space in *Confession* is a hybrid of his aesthetic before and after his conversion. *War and Peace* featured a number of singular, self-contained images which the reader could “view” almost in any order. In a way, the variety of parables in *Confession* echo these verbal paintings. Tolstoy presents the reader with a number of self-contained images throughout the work, for example the man in the boat, the man lost in the forest, the image of the well, and Tolstoy himself suspended between two great

²⁸⁷ Tolstoy, *Confession*, 30.

abysses. Each image relates the same message in slightly different terms, a prominent aspect of his analogies of history in *War and Peace*. It does not affect the reader's understanding of his message to regard them in any particular order. Part of this may be due to the fact that *Confession* is a nonfictional work without a traditional plot.

Tolstoy's increasingly clear awareness of the linear movement of time recalls *Anna Karenina*, in which he still arrests the reader in space and slows the traditional progression of time but for a much shorter period of time. His descriptions, which feature several action words, propel the reader forward in time. In *Confession*, Tolstoy describes feeling stuck. He knows he must move forward, like the man in the boat who must row to overpower the flow of the current, but cannot take that first step, which we see in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*.

II. The Death of Ivan Ilych

In *Ivan Ilych* Tolstoy abandons the estate novel and with it, a move away from the expansive outdoor spaces that were its characteristic setting. The novella is a step beyond the spatial aesthetic of *Confession* toward Tolstoy's late fiction, which takes place almost exclusively in indoor spaces. As in *Confession*, time and representations of space merge. In *Ivan Ilych*, the progressive narrowing of physical spaces accentuates Ivan's awareness of time running out. Tolstoy makes his reader feel that time and space are closing in around him by manipulating the structure of the work as well. Gary Jahn discusses the physical structure of the work and identifies a pattern of decreasing length in chapters as the novella progresses. He writes that, "there is a parallel decrease in the spatial dimensions of the story."²⁸⁸ The first part ends with limiting him to the city. As the story moves forward Ivan is then confined to his home, then his

²⁸⁸ Gary Jahn, "Role of the Ending in Lev Tolstoi's *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 24.3 (1982), 231.

study, then the couch, to the confines of the black bag, and finally within the black borders of his death announcement in the newspaper with which the story begins.

By tracing the life of Ivan Ilych, backward from his death, Tolstoy also underscores the linearity of time. He repeatedly calls attention to the forward movement of time in the novella in his marked emphasis on certain plot points. He uses short rhythmic sentences that recall the language of fairytales. He ends most descriptions of times in Ivan's life with statements like "so Ivan Ilych served for five years," "so things continued for another seven years," "so Ivan Ilych got married," "so Ivan Ilych lived for seventeen years after his marriage," "so they began living in their new home," and "so they lived."²⁸⁹ The simple, paired-down, rhythmic language relates directly to Tolstoy's message. Matual notes that he, "punctuates the meaning of a passage with a line of rhythmic prose...the reader is struck by the iambic cadence of [certain] lines...these rhythmic unities confirm the reader's impression that Tolstoj has paid attention to the minutest details of euphony."²⁹⁰

The novella is also almost entirely achromatic, featuring an abundance of black and white, or light and shadow imagery. David S. Danaher argues that the "motif which unites images of light and dark comes to stand as an emblem of Ivan's journey to truth."²⁹¹ Like most details, images, or colors, the patterns of light and dark in the novella are strategic. Scholars such as Elena Maslova and N. A. Pereverzeva, note the connection of the color black with spiritual and moral deterioration.²⁹² Elena Maslova points out that in Tolstoy's work from the 1880s, the color black plays and especially sinister role. The increased use of black and its symbolic role in

²⁸⁹ Leo Tolstoy, *Tolstoy's Short Fiction*, Translated by Michael R. Katz, (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991), 266, 269, 259, 257, 262.

²⁹⁰ Matual, "Poetics," 286. Matual's examples of Tolstoy's iambic prose are as follows (the inclusion of stress marks is my own): "я думая и чувствую и я..." "но в чём была ошибка, я никак не мог найти."

²⁹¹ David. S. Danaher, "Light and Dark," 227.

²⁹² Elena Aleksandrovna Maslova, "Semantika kolorativov v povestvovanii L. Tolstogo ('Smert' Ivana Il'icha,' 'Kreitserova sonata,' 'D'iavol')," *Problemy istoricheskoi poetiki* 15.1 (2017), 55.

Tolstoy's work is in keeping with his transition to a starker aesthetic that echoes a more restrictive worldview and moral code. Tolstoy's association of this color with chaos, uncertainty, fear, and death begins as early as 1824, when he describes the beginning of his spiritual and moral crisis. He writes, "at first I began experiencing moments of bewilderment; my life would come to a standstill, as if I did not know how to live or what to do, and I felt lost and fell into despair... these moments of bewilderment started to recur more frequently, always taking the same form. On these occasions, when life came to a standstill, the same questions always arose: 'Why? What comes next?'"²⁹³ Tolstoy gives his reader the same sense of dread through a striking visual comparison. He explains how these questions repeated, "demanding answers with more and more urgency. They felt like full stops, always on the same spot, uniting in one large black spot."²⁹⁴

This formidable black spot recalls of course, the black sack that torments Ivan Ilych as he approaches death. The sack, like the multitude of questions in *Confession*, is frightening because it represents the unknown. Scholars have interpreted the sack in numerous ways including a symbol of death,²⁹⁵ an abstraction of the womb that facilitates Ivan's rebirth,²⁹⁶ and as an anal symbol linked with Ivan's illness and the Freudian understanding of excretion and the abject.²⁹⁷ Its variety of symbolisms recalls the multiplicity of views in the writers' religion that so disturbed Tolstoy. The images of the black bag and the black spot make sense in the context of Tolstoy's state of unease and his thirst for a concrete and erudite moral code. He shows how Ivan

²⁹³ Tolstoy, *Confession*, 28.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁹⁵ Danaher sees the black bag/black hole as the embodiment of untruth, negativity, and death.

²⁹⁶ Jahn, "Role of the Ending," 236.

²⁹⁷ Boris Sorokin, "Ivan Il'ich as Jonah: A Cruel Joke," *Canadian Slavic Studies*, 4 (Winter 1971): 487–507.

Ilych must make it through the polyphonic chaos before entering the clarity of monophonic morality, just as Tolstoy himself was wading through his own confusion.

In opposition to the black sack reminiscent of an executioner's hood, Tolstoy portrays Gerasim, the only peasant character in the story and a clear example of Tolstoy's moral ideal, "expressly and almost to the point of absurdity...in terms of light imagery."²⁹⁸ The peasant, a pure-of-heart "natural man," has always occupied a special place in Tolstoy's conception of morality. From the musician in "Lucerne" to Platon Karataev in *War and Peace*, to Platon in *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy has always used peasants as symbols of goodness, compassion, and selflessness in his work. Since there is no room for debate on this point for Tolstoy, he presents Gerasim in unambiguous terms, using clear visual epithets to communicate this point to his reader. Gerasim is never associated with black or dark imagery, unlike other characters like Peter Ivanovich, who are associated with both black and white. Tolstoy repeatedly mentions Gerasim's bright white teeth, "the even, white teeth of a health peasant."²⁹⁹ This description immediately follows the peasant's statement that death, rather than being a sad affair as Peter Ivanovich deems it, is rather "'God's will. We shall all come to it someday."³⁰⁰ Tolstoy shows his reader that Gerasim's outlook is correct by associated him with positive attributes such as a straight, white set of teeth, strong hands, quick agile movements, and the glow of health about him. Tolstoy describes Gerasim as "clean, fresh... and always cheerful and bright,"³⁰¹ which contrasts with the society folk at Ivan's wake who are dressed in black, described as gloomy, moving and bowing mournfully. Tolstoy repeatedly notes that Gerasim beams with an inner light, "the joy of life that beamed from his face." Tolstoy links Gerasim, whose "eyes beamed [as] he showed his

²⁹⁸ Danaher, "Light and Dark," 234.

²⁹⁹ Tolstoy, *Short Fiction*, 255.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 254.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 283.

glistening white teeth,”³⁰² solely with images of light, which in turn connects him to the light at the end of the tunnel that Ivan sees right before his death. This light at the opening of the black sack represents the true way to live, a way of life defined by brotherly love, communion with nature, and acceptance and lack of fear of death, and simple and pure faith in God.

Tolstoy employs many senses, not just the visual, to compare Gerasim to the other characters in the story. He juxtaposes the heavy smell of insence, linked with the rituals of Orthodoxy Tolstoy detested, and the decay of Ivan’s corpse with Gerasim’s “heavy boots emitting a pleasant smell of tar and fresh winter air.” Tolstoy also draws attention to Gerasim’s “strong bare young arms,” “fresh, kind, simple young face,” “deft strong hands” and light movements in comparison with the highly self-conscious movements and appearances of other characters.³⁰³ He makes it absolutely clear to the reader that Gerasim is a model of morality by noting that “health, strength, and vitality in other people were offensive to him [Ivan], but Gerasim’s strength and vitality did not mortify him but soothed him.”³⁰⁴

Generally, however, there remains room for interpretation in Tolstoy’s message in *Ivan Ilych*, a message which James Rice calls “ambiguous and recondite,”³⁰⁵ even within some of the black and white imagery. The color white, according to Elena Maslova, when linked with clothing is first associated with hope and Ivan’s belief in a tomorrow. However, K. A. Nagina sees the color white as having a negative meaning in *The Death of Ivan Ilych* when connected with the body. Ivan’s white-tied servants embody his values of respectability, wealth, and social standing. When he becomes ill and starts to question this manner of living, the color white becomes distasteful to him in the clothing and bodies of his relatives. According to Danaher

³⁰² Ibid., 284.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 285.

³⁰⁵ James L. Rice, “Comic Devices in ‘The Death of Ivan Ilich,’” *SEEJ* 47.1 (Spring 2003), 78.

“Tolstoy uses light in two distinct senses: there is both true and false light in the story. Moreover, he uses dark imagery to reinforce the falseness of concepts, scenes, and characters. Ivan’s journey to the truth, or the true light, is iconically diagramed in his shift in perspective on the value of these light and dark images.”³⁰⁶ Eventually able to see past the superficiality of the false light images, and ignore the meaninglessness of the conventional dark images, Ivan is drawn to images of true light and experiences a moral epiphany and spiritual resurrection. He is, after all, “*le phénix de la famille* as people said.”³⁰⁷

Tolstoy includes many small, seemingly insignificant instances of visual contrast in his short descriptions. The constant push and pull from these contrasts, like the inclusion of several horizontal and vertical elements in a painting or drawing, creates a sense tension and tightness in the work that is not present in novels like *War and Peace* or even *Anna Karenina*. For example, he compares indoor and outdoor spaces through contrasting smells. “Peter Ivanovich found the fresh air particularly pleasant after the smell of incense, the dead body, and carbolic acid.”³⁰⁸ Tolstoy fleshes out this type of sensory contrast between urban and natural spaces in the opening paragraph of *Resurrection*. In the first presentation of Ivan Ilych at his funeral, Tolstoy writes that the dead man lay “as dead men always lie, in a specially heavy way, his rigid limbs sunk in the soft cushions of the coffin.”³⁰⁹ The first pairing is tactile in nature: the rigor mortis of Ivan’s hands and the softness of the coffin pillows. In opposition to Ivan’s rigid (окоченевший), heavy (тяжелый), yellow waxen (желтый восковой), dignified (значительный), and reproachful presence, the reader is immediately met by the refreshing presence of Schwartz who would not let the somber incident to keep him from “unwrapping a new pack of cards...while a footman

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Tolstoy, *Short Fiction*, 225.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 250.

placed four fresh candles on the table”³¹⁰ Tolstoy includes the words fresh (необожженные), playful (игривый), and the verbs refresh (освежить) and toying (играть) to counter the scene described above.

The use of the word необожженные here is interesting. The word, which literally means not burned up, appears in the English translation as “fresh,” most likely to avoid awkward and cumbersome phrasing. This not-burned-up candle carries more meaning than a simple contrast between light and dark, new and old, alive and dead. It gives the sense that the candle is new *for right now*. It has not been burned up *yet*. This yet contained in the word implies that the candle will eventually burn up in its own time, as all candles that are used do.

In one sense, the candle represents the idea that time, like life, moves as quickly or as slowly as it is supposed to in a linear manner from beginning to end. Life begins at birth, when the candle is lit, and ends when it burns up. The metaphor of life as a candle is a common one. Lives that end early are “snuffed out” for example. In the novella, Ivan cannot light a candle at his bedside because it is his time to die, while his wife, who has not reached that point in her life yet and still has time left can light it for him. Yet in another sense the candle, as part of the juxtaposition of death and life in connection with Stoltz connects back to the novella’s general advocacy for an acceptance of death as a natural part of the life cycle. Tied with the idea of rebirth following Ivan’s death, there is also preference given to cyclical time as in *War and Peace*. As he explains in a letter to Strakhov in 1875, “life is a circle or a sphere where there is no end, middle, or beginning, nothing important or unimportant, but where everything is a beginning, everything a middle, everything equally important and necessary; and that the

³¹⁰ Ibid.

cogency and truth of this outlook depends on its inner concord and harmony.”³¹¹ This conceptualization of time recalls Tolstoy’s understanding of history, reflected in the plotlessness of *War and Peace*, which Morson deems almost exclusively “middle.”

The novella begins and ends with Ivan’s death, giving a sense of circular unity to an otherwise linear plotline. The first paragraph concludes with the statement, “Ivan Ilych has died (Иван Ильич-то умер),” and the last sentence in the work reads, “He drew in (втянул) a breath, stopped (остановился) in the midst of a sigh, stretched out (потянулся), and died (умер).”³¹² Here Tolstoy contrasts Ivan’s perspective of his own death with his family’s impression of the event. To those on the outside, Ivan’s death is a short series of events. The staccato feel to the scene is highlighted using four perfective verbs in a sequence. Though life appears to be a collection of singular events like birth, marriage, and death, the experience is much different. For Ivan, death is a drawn-out struggle in the confines of the black sack. It is grappling with the meaning of life, the comparison of adulthood and childhood, and finally the acceptance of death as the natural conclusion of life.

Tolstoy describes Ivan’s experience of death using terms first seen in *Anna Karenina*. He describes how Ivan “fell through the hole and there at the bottom was a light. What had happened to him was like the sensation one sometimes experiences in a railway carriage when one thing one is going backwards while one is really going forwards and suddenly becomes aware of the real direction.”³¹³ Anna’s experience differs from Ivan’s though the image is the same. She “was constantly beset by moments of doubt as to whether the car was going forward

³¹¹ Christian, *Letters Volume I*, 287.

³¹² Tolstoy, *Short Fiction*, 247, 302 [Tolstoi, *PSS* 26:113].

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 301.

or back or standing still altogether.”³¹⁴ Anna is unsure of the direction she is headed, if any at all, while Ivan struggles through the confusion to find he is moving forward, toward the light. Instead of disrupting the linear time as he did in *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy shows that time continues to move forward unencumbered leading to an inevitable death. Ivan Ilych explains this realization using another spatial representation of the forward progression of time. He muses to himself, “it was as if I had been going downhill while I imagined I was going up. And that is really what it was. I was going up in public opinion, but to that same extent life was ebbing away from me.”³¹⁵

The aesthetic difference between *Ivan Ilych* and *Anna Karenina* regarding color, description, and the representation of time and space are quite clear. The nuances between *Ivan Ilych* and its nonfiction counterpart *Confession* are subtler. The latter two works share a black and white palette and a high concentration of stark visual contrasts. As noted above, the representation of space in *Confession*, or rather the depiction of a spatial vacuum, show Tolstoy stuck on the way to an entirely new aesthetic. *Ivan Ilych* moves a step further toward the visual aesthetic of *Resurrection* in its use of increasingly tighter indoor spaces. Unlike *Confession*, *Ivan Ilych* does not contain any ekphrastic passages. Though he employs several visual devices to communicate his message to the reader, the novella focuses more on the verbal. Tolstoy describes the life of Ivan Ilych using a number of images, only to reduce his life to a few printed words surrounded by a black border on a white page.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 94.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 295.

The aesthetic change seen between works like *Anna Karenina* compared with *The Death of Ivan Ilych* is such that Gary Jahn argues that the latter prefigures Symbolist literature in its use of symbol and metaphor.³¹⁶ Justin Weir, in a similar vein, remarks that the novella “synthesizes and demonstrates Tolstoy’s aesthetics or narrative diversion in its late-career iteration... [and] relentlessly demands that as readers we confront not just our own morality but also the logical end of Tolstoy’s early realism.”³¹⁷ Edward Wasiolek writes that *Ivan Ilych* is “more schematic and deliberate than the early tales, it is more pruned of descriptive and analytic detail. It reads like a distillation rather than a representation of life.”³¹⁸

I argue that Tolstoy’s later work does not represent the decline of his realism, but rather a new kind of representation that pairs with his newly formed understanding of reality. *Confession* opens the door not only to Tolstoy’s new philosophy, but also a new approach to the visual, an aesthetic that echoes his post-conversion morality as well as his ever-changing attitudes and approaches to realism. In his reflection on those works written during his tenure as a priest of the false religion of writers, Tolstoy critiques the canonical aim of realism, mainly mimesis. He writes that, “the reflection of life in poetry and art of all kinds gave me joy and I enjoyed watching life through the mirror of art. But when I began to search for the meaning of life, when I began to feel the necessity of living, I found this mirror either unnecessary, superfluous and ridiculous, or tormenting.”³¹⁹ Therefore Tolstoy’s late realism does not attempt to recreate the world in front of the reader’s eyes as it did in *War and Peace* or even *Anna Karenina*. Instead, it attempts to recreate Tolstoy’s own understanding and experience of reality within the reader. As he explains in “What is Art?” “art is a human activity that consists in one person consciously,

³¹⁶ Gary R. Jahn, *The Death of Ivan Ilich: An Interpretation*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 19.

³¹⁷ Weir, *Alibi*, 111.

³¹⁸ Edward Wasiolek, *Tolstoy: The Major Fiction*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 167.

³¹⁹ Tolstoy, *Confession*, 33.

using certain external signs, transmitting to others feelings expressed by him, and other people becoming infected by these feelings and experiencing them.”³²⁰ He redefines reality as one’s feelings and internal experiences rather than the external world around us.

Vasily Alexeev, a tutor of the Tolstoy children, recalls a conversation with Tolstoy about his religious views. “Tolstoy pointing one winter morning to the frosty patterns made on the window pane by the sun, which he compared to popular religious belief. The people see the patterns, he explained, whereas he wanted to look beyond them towards the source of the light.”³²¹ In his late realism, Tolstoy attempts to move past the distracting patterns, the superfluous details, and pretentious literary language of what he terms commercial or false art, including his own pre-conversion work. His late realism tries to find the source of the light, that is, the internal reality, the message that drives him, and show it to his reader through this new, unadorned aesthetic that culminates in his last novel *Resurrection*.

³²⁰ Tolstoy, “What is Art,” 40.

³²¹ Bartlett, *Tolstoy*, 263.

CONCLUSION

Unlike many Russian writers of the nineteenth century, Tolstoy did not experiment with the visual arts in a literal sense, except for his short-lived study of sculpture in the spring of 1866. His manuscripts do not contain character sketches like those found in Gogol's drafts, or self-portraits in the margins like Pushkin's. He did not dabble in landscape painting like Lermontov or have a talent for drawing like his contemporary Dostoevsky. However, his use of techniques normally found in the plastic arts and affinity for ekphrases of varying types present his reader with a uniquely visual experience of the realities he creates in his prose.

In this dissertation I discuss a number of Tolstoy's works to show the shifts in his aesthetic diachronically rather than give an exhaustive examination of select works. After discussing an early work, the short story "Lucerne" (1857) and the 1899 novel *Resurrection* to establish the two extremes of Tolstoy's visual aesthetic and moral and philosophical worldview, I move through his *oeuvre* chronologically. I argue that Tolstoy creates a hybrid artistic medium, combining aspects of the verbal and visual arts. As the author cherished the concept of truth throughout his life, I suggest that he augments his prose with visual art techniques to bring his reader closer to the truths of his works. In semiotic terms, he attempts to create natural signs by means of the arbitrary sign system of the written word.

I use the terms "painterly" and "draughtsmanly" to describe the two aesthetic poles that I identify in chapter one. I arrive at these terms by combining literary and visual theoretical frameworks. By combining spatial forms with a rich color palette, sense of dynamism and movement, and an acute attention to detail I arrive at the term "painterly." The mixture of temporal forms with an achromatic color scheme, frequent use of visual contrasts, and use of a simple and accessible writing style is what composes his "draughtsmanly" aesthetic.

In the division of the verbal and visual arts, Lessing proposes that the visual is inherently spatial as plastic arts like painting, drawing, and sculpture, only capable of depicting a single moment in time, are more concerned with space. The verbal arts such as poetry and prose by their nature deal with sequences of events, or plot. In this way, Lessing calls the verbal arts temporal. Joseph Frank, in response to Lessing, identifies what he calls spatial forms in the temporal art of literature. In my examination of Tolstoy's work, I find that his earlier works contain more aspects of spatial literature while his later works feature more temporal qualities.

Spatial forms as identified by Frank and expanded upon by other scholars are devices in a work of literature that impede the forward progression of the plot. For example, the extended descriptions of landscapes and battlefields in *War and Peace* detain the reader in the space of the novel, keeping him or her from moving further in the plot. The mesh-like overlap of plotlines in *War and Peace*, the constant moves linearly and laterally in time, in addition to the enormous cast of characters and frequent failure of plotlines to resolve are all ways in which the work defies the traditional norms of the novel as a genre.

Different types of ekphrasis are another way that the narrative flow is suspended. The detailed description of the various portraits and genre paintings in *Anna Karenina* for instance slow the forward progression of time in the novel. The landscape descriptions, instances of associative ekphrasis in both "Lucerne" and *War and Peace* completely halt the progression of plot and arrest the reader in the visual space of the work. Instances of depictive ekphrasis, such as the description of the *Roi de Rome* painting by Gérard or references to paintings by Gros in *War and Peace* transport the reader out of the novel almost entirely.

My dissertation contributes to this field of inquiry in a number of ways. First and foremost, it is the first project to explore visual art techniques in Tolstoy's aesthetic and to

examine the numerous gradations of ekphrasis in his work. I argue that, finding the literary arts inadequate to communicate his reality to the reader, Tolstoy creates a hybrid aesthetic that includes techniques of the plastic arts, namely painting, drawing, and sculpture. By introducing the planar and chromatic divisions in his landscape descriptions that are found in traditional landscape painting composition, focusing on specific physical traits of his characters to create visual epithets, using line and color strategically, and employing several types of ekphrasis in his prose, Tolstoy works to create natural signs through the arbitrary sign system of language.

Secondly, I investigate the short story “Lucerne,” which is often overlooked in scholarship in favor of Tolstoy’s more well-known short fiction. I argue that “Lucerne” is exemplary of Tolstoy’s “painterly” aesthetic and a work in which his use of landscape painting techniques is most noticeable. I identify these landscapes as the first appearance of associative ekphrasis in Tolstoy’s *oeuvre*. I also consider the aesthetics of *Confession* in addition to the work’s message, which is often the focus of scholarship. I draw connections between *Confession* and peasant wood prints (*lubki*) and discuss how this simple and accessible visual aesthetic aids Tolstoy in his transition to a more clear and concise writing style that is comprehensible to more than an educated, literary elite. The visual aesthetic is not separate from the work’s didacticism, it is part of it.

Finally, I suggest an alternative to traditional scholarship which deems Tolstoy’s post-conversion work as aesthetically inferior to his earlier writings. I suggest that Tolstoy’s early and late stylistics be viewed as if they were different artistic mediums. In this way, critics no longer hold the same expectations in mind for the later works that they do for the earlier ones. The achromatic palette and verbal contrapasso of novels like *Resurrection* do not disappoint the reader in their lack of color or detail. The adoption of a stark and simplified visuality and writing

style is seen not as the work of a senile religious zealot who has abandoned his art, but rather as the creations of an artist who has strategically altered his work over time to better illustrate his new inner reality.

This dissertation, as any research project inevitably does, raises as many questions as it answers. A major area for future investigation is the application of the “painterly” and “draughtsmanly” categories to works of Tolstoy’s not discussed in this project. How, for example, do literary sketches like the Sevastopol series compare to “Lucerne”? What are the gradations of Tolstoy’s visual aesthetic in later stories such as “Master and Man,” “Father Sergius,” or *The Kreutzer Sonata*? Which works, if any, are outliers that do not fit the gradual shift from a “painterly” to “draughtsmanly” visuality?

A second area that merits further exploration is the discussion of Tolstoy’s relationships with painters like the Wanderers (Передвижники). As previously mentioned, Tolstoy admired the sculptor Trubetskoi. The author also had close relationships with the famous realist painters Ilya Repin and Nikolai Ge. Scholars have already investigated Tolstoy’s influence on the Wanderers in some depth, however the aesthetic influences, if any, of these artists on Tolstoy’s stylistics has yet to be thoroughly explored.³²²

Finally, an interesting topic for future examination is the comparison of the manner in which Tolstoy engages with different art forms with the way in which he discusses the different arts in his didactic works like the essay *What is Art?* How does his discussion of the different art

³²² There is of course some scholarship on this topic already, such as E. N. Artsibasova’s article “Vliianie L. N. Tolstogo na tvorchestvo khudozhnikov-peredvizhnikov v istoricheskoi situatsii kontsa XIX – nachala XX v.,” *Izvestiia Altaiskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* 4-3 (2008): 7–11.

forms such as painting, literature, music, and theater change over time? How are his shifting attitudes toward the arts reflected in his stylistics? As is often the case, Tolstoy did not always practice what he preached. What can we learn from the inevitable inconsistencies between his theories on art and his actual artistic creations?

Tolstoy's status as a paragon of realist literature makes his discomfort with the written world all the more interesting. The change in Tolstoy's visual aesthetic in relation to his worldview is also reason to question the verisimilitude of realism of any kind, be it in painting or literature. It reminds us that the representation of reality is inherently subjective. Tolstoy's "realism" is filtered first through his own understanding of the world around him, his experiences, biases, and motivations, then reproduced for the reader through a medium that the author himself found inadequate. The unique hybridity of verbal and visual that characterizes Tolstoy's fiction is important because it challenges the reader to reevaluate the dividing lines between artistic media and to interrogate the ability of any one medium to depict reality.

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